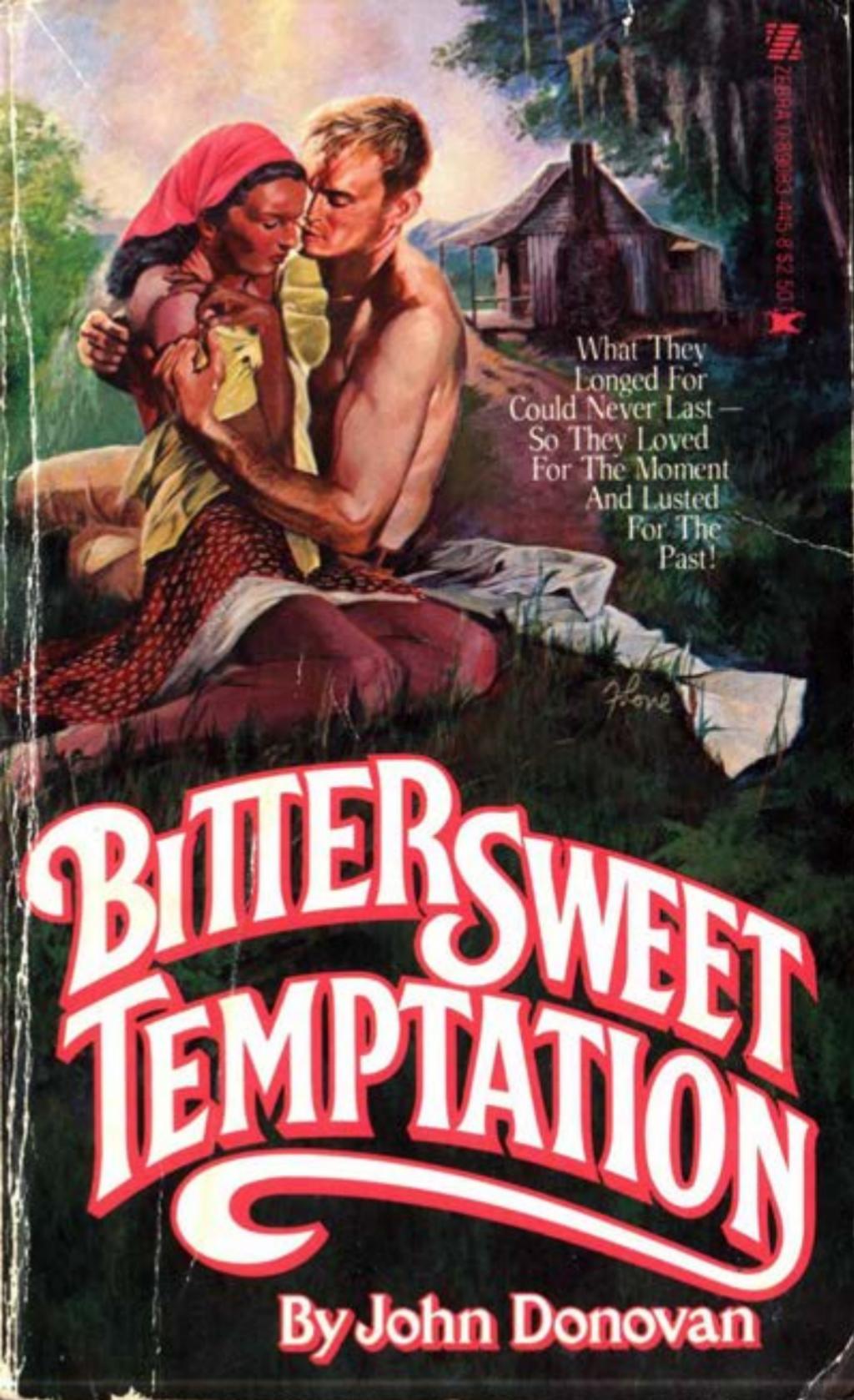


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What They
Longed For
Could Never Last —
So They Loved
For The Moment
And Lusted
For The
Past!

Flora

BITTERSWEET TEMPTATION

By John Donovan



When Jimmy Lee Hawkes, son of a white southern farmer, left home, it was to fulfill his destiny of becoming an Evangelist minister and to sever the strong bonds of passion he had for the sensuous black beauty Rena. But his weakness of the flesh resulted in Rena secretly bearing his child, and the ties Jimmy Lee tried so hard to abandon only bound him more tightly to the one woman he would forever love.

LOVE ME, AND LEAVE ME

Rena stood in the dim light looking into Jimmy Lee's face, recognizing the love look, the pain and yearning in the boy's eyes. She kissed him with an open mouth and moist lips and his response was immediate and almost electric.

"Wait a minute, love," she whispered. "Follow me."

In a matter of minutes they were at the small shabby building. Slowly, carefully, they undressed one another. He had never seen her naked before, so he was unprepared for the sheer magnificence of her body. She was sculpted ebony; firm and lithe, with breasts that were full and taut.

As they consummated their love for the first time, they both knew that somehow things would never be the same again. They were both fools taking risks, but Rena was the bigger fool. She knew Jimmy Lee would be leaving soon and she had to face the painful truth — she was deeply in love with him and there was nothing she could do to keep him . . .

BITTER SWEET TEMPTATION

By John Donovan



**ZEBRA BOOKS
KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP.**



ZEBRA BOOKS

are published by

KENSINGTON PUBLISHING CORP.

**21 East 40th Street
New York, N.Y. 10016**

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First Printing: February, 1979

Printed in the United States of America

ONE

The hound just ahead of them yelped excitedly. "We got us somethin'," the boy said, anticipation edging his voice. Cradling his rifle on one shoulder, he broke into a careful trot through the underbrush. His companion, a slim figure in faded overalls and a torn sweater, ran after him, trying not to trip and fall in the darkness. Nervously she searched the heavy thicket with a faint beam of light from a battered flashlight.

"C'mon," the boy called irritably over his shoulder. "Keep up, damnit, I need that light."

"All right, all right."

They were both breathing hard by now. Bessie, the old hound, had something—a coon or maybe a bobcat—treed just ahead of them in the darkness.

He caught up with Bessie circling and barking excitedly around an ancient sugar maple. The forest was dense and overgrown here and the rays of the full moon did not penetrate the foliage.

"Shine the light up in the branches," the boy ordered.

The feeble light probed the branches overhead as Bessie yelped hysterically and tried to climb the tree. The light picked up a shadow and then, the reflection of two large and malevolent green eyes. As the boy raised his rifle and fired the beast leaped down at them and scuttled away. Bessie howled with rage and gave chase; the boy swore and his companion screamed in fright. Whatever it was had gotten clean away.

The boy whistled Bessie back to his side and ran after the girl. "Rena . . . Rena . . . wait up. It's gone." He jogged through the bushes and found her in a clearing sprawled on a hummock of grass with her head propped up on a fallen log. She pulled off a stained gray felt hat and smiled up at him. Against her flawless black skin the whites of her eyes and teeth were luminous in the moon light.

In one easy movement the boy slipped down on the hummock and placed his head on the log next to hers.

The girl started to laugh quietly. "I read about you in school," she said. "You the great white hunter, that's what you are. You Trader Horn. You are for a fact."

The boy placed his rifle on the grass beside him, spun around and playfully grabbed her by the shoulders. They wrestled in fun for a moment and then were still. The boy leaned away from the girl, looked at her and said, "What do you suppose that was? I never saw anything that size before. It jumped right at us."

Their faces were only inches apart. Rena didn't answer

him, but she had a different look about her somehow. He noticed it immediately. Her eyes, enormous at close quarters, glistened in the moonlight. Her beautifully shaped lips parted invitingly to reveal a pink tongue and perfect white teeth. He responded to the unspoken invitation in a rush, kissing her hungrily. They lunged at one another, their tongues wildly searching one another's mouths. Bessie whined beside them and crawled away.

In a matter of moments their love-making became more intense. Young, healthy, at the height of their physical powers, they both yearned to go all the way, to blindly couple and to hell with the consequences. But they never had. Two or three times before their hands had expertly and lovingly brought them both to a climax and so it was tonight.

They would come to it, they knew that, but in their own good time. The enormity of their illicit relationship had frightened them into extremes of caution not usually found in a sixteen-year-old boy and a girl a year younger. If they were found out, both their families would make them outcasts. They were frightened of what they were doing, but they had been compulsively drawn to one another for the last several weeks.

There was a nip in the late September night air as Rena got up and washed on the bank of a small brook. She washed her hands gingerly in the icy water. The boy, a head taller than her, walked up behind her and took her in his arms.

"Oh, Jimmy, we are crazy," she moaned and drew him ever closer.

"We'd better head back," he said. "It's gettin' late." They clung together for a moment and then she nipped

him on the ear, broke away, and waving one hand, crooned out, "See you, lover. 'Bye.'" And was gone in the darkness.

As Jimmy whistled up Bessie and headed for home he thought, it was always like this afterwards. Now that he had had his fun he was having second thoughts about the consequences of his deeds. He guessed his folks would just about disown him. The old man would want to kill him and the truth would just about kill his mom. Then, there was Damon . . . Damon Daniels, Rena's father, in many ways closer to him than any of his own family. No telling what he might do.

"Good God," he said aloud in frustration as he quickened his walk home. We're just rubbing around, liking the feeling of each other's skin, he thought, but he realized immediately that that was not exactly right. If that rubbing around led to more serious stuff Rena could get a big belly, and then they'd both be in a helluva jam. He knew they were going to go all the way soon. It was more than the flesh could take. He'd have to get into Savannah somehow and get some rubbers . . . safes. He'd been told about them at school.

He'd heard that many of the older fellows, who were shaggin' both nigger and white gals, were using them. It was done for sure, and according to his father that's why there were so many light-skinned niggers around. But most of the people his family knew, the farmers and church people and all, all thought the mixing of the races and fornication between the races was just about the worst thing you could do. Man, it was bad.

He smiled to himself. Yes, morally it was bad, but by jingo, it was awfully good. Rena was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, white or black. She was unique; she

didn't look like anyone else around there. Certainly not like Damon who was, himself, a handsome negro.

He'd heard his mother say that Rena favored her mother, who supposedly had been half-Cherokee. Rena was blacker than her mother, who was a deep ebony. But she was less black than her father. Rena's mother was never spoken of by Damon or Rena. She had packed up and left home when Rena was only three. Damon never looked back and he had taught Rena not to.

Jimmy called Rena "Black Velvet" because of the way her skin felt and looked. Even when she was a young child it was evident that Rena, who had a small, well-shaped head with rich, wavy red-highlighted black hair, would grow up to be a stunning woman.

Jimmy's mother had said, "I declare, that itty-bitty child looks like some kind princess. Damon's hair is wool, but she's got soft hair like her mother. And that child is going to cause a peck of trouble, just like her ma."

Sarah Hawkes, a tall, plain-looking woman with a large nose, had thought it remarkable that Rena's small, high-bridged, delicately aquiline nose could have found its way on to a black face. "Unearthly, how that child looks like her mother," she would say, "only darker."

Angus Hawkes looked like he could have been his wife's brother instead of her third cousin. He was a couple of inches taller than she, but had the same rough-hewn, large-featured face. They were hard-working people and they looked it. By local standards, the Hawkes were well-to-do. They had a large brick house with oversized rooms and wide verandahs, though their property was basically a dairy farm, a big one, and it took the entire family, a foreman and several hired hands, to run it.

Angus Hawkes had inherited the two-hundred acre property from his father and it had prospered under his direction. Some seventy Guernseys grazed placidly on their meadowland and produced rich milk which was marketed in Savannah.

It would be fair to say that the Great Depression had little affect on the farmers of Lanier County. There were a few failures, some mortgages were foreclosed, but compared to the people in the big cities the farmers and rural workers had managed to come through fairly well. Now, it was 1933, and there was a new feeling of confidence everywhere. Hoover was out, Roosevelt was in, and "happy days were here again." Of course, that was all talk; nothing much had changed, but people were willing to hope again.

Angus Hawkes felt so good when FDR won the election he bought a new four-door Buick sedan. The family didn't get to ride in it much, except to go to church on Sundays, but it looked splendid standing in one of the spare cow sheds. Jimmy Lee, self-appointed caretaker of the Buick, polished the shiny blue body as often as he could.

At the age of sixteen Jimmy Lee was a shade over six feet tall, and as strong as a grown man. He did a grown man's work around the farm, too. Milking early morning and evening, cleaning stables, loading milk cans, forking manure, besides going to school every day, too. In the spring and early summer he played on the Bascombe High School baseball team. It had taken some doing, but with the aid of his ma he had been able to convince Angus Hawkes that he should be allowed to play right field for the Blue-Jays.

Sarah Hawkes had lost her first child, Angus, in

childbirth, so it was understandable to everyone that Jimmy Lee was her favorite offspring. She loved them all, Janie Lou, Rafe, and Margaret Ann equally well, but there was a special feeling there for Jimmy Lee.

Sarah Hawkes' special love for her eldest son revealed itself in little ways. She was always consulting with Mona about the preparation of the special sweets and desserts she knew Jimmy Lee favored, whether it be hoe-cake, rhubarb or pecan pie. More often than not Mona was instructed to bake Jimmy Lee's favorites instead of those of the other children.

From the time Jimmy Lee first learned to read Sarah Hawkes had made him recite the scriptures aloud. Now and then, as the other children grew older, they were selected to quote from the bible, but most of the time it was Jimmy Lee who was elected to practice preaching. The look of love which illuminated Sarah's face when Jimmy Lee spoke was eloquent proof of her special feelings. Although she looked kindly on her other children, that special look was reserved for Jimmy Lee alone.

This subtle feeling of being set apart from the others because, in some indefinable way, he was better or more valuable and much more loved, imparted a feeling of strength and inner confidence to Jimmy Lee. He enjoyed being singled out at home and in school, and he seemed to flourish as the center of attention be it in the batter's box or in a school play.

Sarah's influence on Jimmy Lee had been effective in many ways. Even as a youngster he strove to be even-handed and fair in all his relationships. This was recognized by his siblings and fellow students by the fact he was frequently called on to settle their disputes. They

often said of him: "Not the brightest young fellow around, but he sure is level-headed."

As in most farm households where the children were assigned chores almost as soon as they could walk, Sarah Hawkes was a severe, albeit just, matriarch. In the house her word was law; in the cow barns and the world outside, Angus Hawkes made the decisions. In actual fact, however, Angus increasingly turned to his wife for advice on business decisions. Sarah was sharper than anyone else in the family and they both knew it. This knowledge was a great comfort to him and he felt fortunate in having a smart woman by his side.

Now Jimmy Lee walked out of the forest and looked up the rolling meadowland a half mile or so to where the big, comfortable, brick house, with its slate roof and sweeping verandahs, stood. His father had built it just six years ago, paying all cash on the barrel head. A good thing it turned out, when the stock market crashed two years later. Jimmy Lee didn't quite understand how a financial panic could affect everything, but it had, and he had felt the fear in his parents then.

Sam Monroe, the mayor of Mint Hill, had told Jimmy Lee that his father had one of the finest farms and farmhouses in Lanier County. He had felt right proud when old Sam had said that about the property. He noticed, too, that some of the other kids at school had started to treat him with a shade more respect. Jimmy Lee didn't quite know how to handle that. He hadn't done anything; it was all his mother and father.

Several influences in Jimmy Lee's short life had made him preternaturally superstitious, not to say religious. The major influences were three in number: his mother, his Sunday School teacher, Miss Ada Bell Fanuel, and

Damon Daniels, his father's black foreman.

Ada Bell Fanuel, a portly, middle-aged spinster, had been teaching bible classes for fifteen years. For five of those, Jimmy Lee was her pupil every Sunday from the time he was six years of age until he was eleven.

Miss Fanuel was a product of the school of hellfire and brimstone. She taught that Jehovah was a God of vengeance, a God who was stern and unforgiving. And she scared hell out of the kids, Jimmy Lee included.

Pain and punishment were very real to Miss Fanuel because she suffered much and sincerely believed that she was being punished for her sins. Miss Fanuel was afflicted with hemorrhoids.

Jimmy Lee could see her now. She would walk into class carrying a small inflated tube—a children's beach toy—and then, a look of trepidation on her round face, she would ease her bottom down on tube and chair. Once settled, she would take out her bible text and read from it.

Jimmy Lee could still hear Miss Fanuel's voice: "The Lord said," she intoned, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.' And what does that mean, boys and girls?" she would ask.

Usually there would be no answer from the class.

"It means," Miss Fanuel would add in a tone of finality, "that if you are sinful and break God's laws you will be cast into the flames of hell where you will burn forever." Miss Fanuel would wince as she felt a stab of pain in her rectum, moving a bit off the pneumatic ring in her enthusiasm.

"Oh, children," she would add, the pain making her eyes fill with tears, "children, hear me well. Your eternity is at stake. This is the most important thing in

your life, to follow God's teachings, to live the good life."

Miss Fanuel's dire threats of fiery retribution had made a great impression on Jimmy Lee when he was very young, and when he thought about it now her words tended to make him uneasy. He had been particularly disturbed by the reproduction of a painting of the Seven Rings of Hell which she'd brought to class one Sunday. There they were, all the poor wretches who had fallen short of the Lord's mark: the murderers, adulterers, usurers, even the masturbators, according to Miss Fanuel. All standing or lying about in various forms of fiery misery, all doomed to the inferno forever. A sobering thought to someone ten years or less.

Jimmy Lee's mother believed in an Old Testament God, but her interpretation of the deity was not as frightening as Miss Fanuel's. There was punishment and damnation to be sure, but there was happiness, blessedness, and joy aplenty too. Most of all, Jimmy Lee had loved listening to his mother's lovely contralto voice when she sang a hymn of hope.

Added to his Sunday School teaching and maternal religious instruction, Jimmy Lee was shaped by yet another religious teacher, Damon Daniels. The rugged black foreman was never stridently religious with Jimmy Lee at any time the boy could remember. It seemed Damon was always there, sometime in the past, pointing out the great miracles of life, the mysteries of nature.

Jimmy Lee remembered walking out behind the barns with Damon some two or three years ago. It was a beautiful night, bell clear, a three-quarter moon riding high, and the constellations seeming close enough to touch.

"What do you think about, son," Damon asked him,

"when you see a night like this?"

Jimmy Lee had been caught short. He hesitated, looked at the sky, and said, "Gee, I dunno. Guess that the weather is gonna hold. Should have a nice day tomorrow."

Damon shook his head in agreement. "That's right, you're right, but there's something else."

"What's that?"

Damon threw an arm around the youngster's shoulder and said, "Have you never wondered why it all works so well?"

Jimmy Lee gulped. "You mean the world?"

"Sure, boy, that's what I mean. The sun comes up and shines on the crops n' everything, making it all grow. It sets and the moon and stars come out and man and beast get a chance to sleep. You know that expression, 'there's a time for everything . . . a time for living, a time for dying, a time for plowing, and a time for reaping'."

Jimmy Lee pondered Damon's words. They made good sense.

"The universe is incredible, it's beyond man's conception," Damon said, weighing each word carefully. "Oh, they's scientists that can tell how many light years the moon is from the earth and stuff like that, but there ain't no man that can explain how, or why, it works. You got all these planets whirling around in space; you got Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury."

"What are those, Damon?"

"Why, boy," Damon said, "they's planets just like the earth and they're all up there spinning around just like us; may have folks on 'em just like us too. The Lord only knows."

At ten, Jimmy Lee had not learned any astronomy, so

this was big news indeed. If Damon attributed the order of the universe to divine direction that was good enough for him. As far as he was concerned, Damon was accurate about most things that happened on the farm. He could predict if a calf would be stillborn or a breech birth and was pretty good about preparing poultices for bee stings or hornet bites.

To young Jimmy Lee, Damon was the complete, all-purpose man.

Now Jimmy Lee thought about his other friends as he trudged up the hill in the moonlight. Two or three of the fellows at school were really keen: Ron MacIver, Wayne Crandall, and Jimmy Gibbins. As it turned out all three of them were on the baseball team and they had been in school together since kindergarten.

He placed the rifle barrel behind his neck and carried it by draping his hands, one on the barrel, one on the stock. Suddenly, the impact of a thought made him stop. His best friend, the one he liked most, the one he most enjoyed himself with, was Rena. It had always been Rena and it had nothing to do with the sex they had discovered in the last two or three weeks.

He first met Rena when Damon had started working on the farm as a hired hand ten years ago. Now, Damon was the foreman, and lived better than a lot of white men in the district. He lived better, according to Angus Hawkes, because he worked twice as hard as any two men, white or black, in the county.

It was Damon who first taught young Jimmy Lee how to milk, ride, and herd. The big muscular black man had always been someone for Jimmy to marvel at. For one thing he was reputed to be the strongest man in Lanier County, and for another, he had served in

France with the United States Army and had even gotten a medal. And was this how he was paying back his old friend? Fooling around with his only daughter.

There was no getting around it: he did feel lousy-rotten about playing games with Damon's only child. He had even made sincere resolutions to himself to stop in the darkness of his bedroom, but the next day, when he got to rubbing around Rena, he forgot all of his good intentions. What was it that Pierce Earle had said? "A stiff pecker has no conscience, and a quivering quim no fear?" Jimmy Lee sensed there was a pack of wisdom in that expression.

He knew that his mother would like to die if she ever found out what he was doing. She would think his sin was all the worse because the girl was black, but more than that was the fact the girl's father was Damon, a respected colored minister.

Perhaps, he thought, he was ignoring the Lord's commandments because his mother constantly recited them over and over to her family. There was such a thing, he was sure, of getting too much religion. After a while the sins just become words that don't mean anything. Adultery. Why, the word didn't even sound too bad anymore. Besides it had to do with married people. What he and Rena were doing was not even fornication. It was only "M-M," as Jimmy Lee called it, an abbreviation for mutual masturbation.

And what about Rena? Fooling around with her the way he had, he knew that she was a virgin, as tight as a spring water clam. He didn't want to use her badly, the way he knew some of the older fellows had done to other black girls. There was no question of that. For the better part of ten years they had played together in secret in the Big Piney woods back of the farm.

Damon had restored a tumble-down cabin at the edge of the woods, making it into a snug little house of four rooms, with windows, screens, and something unheard of for a black farm hand, an indoor bathroom. Still, for all his efforts, his wife had run off and left him to bring up young Rena alone.

Rena approached the cabin in the dark. Damon wouldn't be home from Happy Valley for an hour or more, so she had no need to worry. She walked through the thicket of persimmon and briars and skirted a growth of honeysuckle and thistles that grew close to the cabin. They had almost done it tonight. They would have to be awfully careful or it would be the livin' end for this little nigger. Hell's bells, two of the girls in her class at the negro school had had to drop out because they got pregnant. Nothing much happened to them, but they didn't have Damon for a poppa. Ever since her momma had run off he was always reading and quoting the bible, like a regular preacher, which was why he was away tonight. Damon was leading a prayer meeting over in Happy Valley, as he did twice a week. And on those nights, Jimmy Lee and Rena met in the Big Piney woods.

Rena loved and even respected her father, but she was convinced he was too good to live, or to live with. She was a woman, almost in full bloom, and she had the cravin'. She had contained it, controlled it, but she knew what she needed. Hell's fire, you can't live on a farm and not know it. In every species it is the same thing: when the females are ready the males are in rut and—wham!

But she didn't want to get pregnant. She might be a woman in her physical needs at fifteen, but she sure enough didn't need a little bastard. Where she was going,

what she eventually would do, she didn't know. This was not a place where a young black girl could make many plans. The negro school she attended was a joke as far as she was concerned. The "Perfessor," as her teacher was called, barely had a high school education himself. Even he looked like he wanted to jump on her. He was only twenty-three and a randy-looking devil, but that's why she got good marks. She'd smile, waggle her tail, and then run away. That man was not goin' to get nothin' off this gal.

She didn't think all that much about her passion for Jimmy Lee, because she had had it for so long. It seemed that ever since she'd first met the tall white boy she thought of him as something special; first as an older brother, and then, as a lover.

Even when they were very young and had first started playing innocently together in the woods, their relationship had been secret, had had the quality of forbidden fruit. In the same way Jimmy Lee feared his family and white neighbors would discover his intimacies with Rena, so Rena was afraid of the obloquy which would befall her should Damon or the blacks learn what was going on.

And when they started shaggin' for real—and Rena knew sooner or later they would—it would be Rena who would have to worry about the little pickaninny. Black or white, they all cut and ran when the baby was due. She knew plenty about that; she had seen that happen to both black and white girls, some of them younger than she was now.

She knew she was a little crazy to mess around with Jimmy Lee, but it was exciting, and she felt alive when she was with him. That was what life really was, wasn't it?

she asked herself. Taking risks, striking out and doing what you weren't supposed to. That was part of the excitement. And it was a heady feeling to have that handsome white boy hunger for her caresses. And he wasn't a redneck either; he was innately good and kind to her and to everyone else. So to the devil with what the future might hold, she would say to herself; there'll be plenty of time ahead of me to be sorry.

Now she climbed over the old snake fence and walked through the well ordered vegetable patch toward her home, Damon's cabin. It was compact, secure and neat; a tribute to her father's pride in his work. She didn't remember her mama much at all. Just an eerie whisper of a memory, kind of fogged up. The feeling of once having been cuddled, fondled, and sung to long ago. She felt a certain sympathy for her mama. It must have been hard to live with someone who always did right. Rena knew that it was hard for her, even though she loved Damon very much. Her mama should not have abandoned her completely. That was wrong, unless she was dead. That was always possible. Otherwise, she should have come by every couple of years just to check on her baby and see that she was well.

Rena swung open the rear screen door and walked into the kitchen. She struck a match and lit a kerosene lamp and made her way to her bedroom. God, she wished that Jimmy were here now. She'd make him take her again and again. She was a woman in heat and she knew it and revelled in it. Next time, she thought; next time, but no babies.

Jimmy's old alarm clock commenced its tinny chatter. He silenced it with one hand and then, after a moment's

pause, swung himself out of bed. He dressed quickly in his work clothes and after a hastily gulped breakfast of rolls and coffee was in the cow barns, his head pressing into the side of a big Guernsey, his hands mechanically squeezing her udders. He kept his eyes closed as the milk hissed into the bucket. He had learned to pace himself, and he now milked twenty cows in the morning and twenty cows in the evening.

After the cows had been turned out to pasture and his other chores were done, Jimmy Lee and Rafe trotted back to the house, took off their stable boots and changed for school. Rafe, seven years younger than Jimmy Lee, went to the grammar school at Wade's Crossing, but they were able to walk part of the way together. Their sisters, Janie Lou and Margaret Anne, were given their daily ride to school by the Traynors, neighbors who had girls about the same age as the Hawkes' sisters.

Bascombe High School was reckoned to be one of the better schools in the county and had sent many of its graduates to colleges in the state, such as Oglethorpe and the University of Georgia. Jimmy Lee had no illusions about his chances of going to college. His mother was set on it, but Angus Hawkes knew that his son was not a good student. When Jimmy Lee was asked how he was doing in school he would reply, "Jes tol'able . . . jes tol'able."

His answer was a total exaggeration. He was "tol'able" in a few subjects, but in mathematics and English, he was extremely poor. No one on the faculty at Bascombe High expected the good-looking farm boy to carve a career for himself through education, but there was a feeling that if he wanted to, Jimmy Lee could become a professional athlete.

As a sophomore right fielder for the baseball team

earlier that year Jimmy Lee had attracted more attention in the local paper than any other player in years. Jimmy Lee was known as "Bascombe's Big Stick" because of his high batting average and the twenty-one home runs he hit in only thirty-three games.

Everyone agreed that without Jimmy Lee, Bascombe would not have won the state championship. There was even talk that scouts from the semi-professional teams had notified their front offices in the majors that there was a really good prospect at Bascombe High.

Though Jimmy Lee revelled in his popularity, he was becomingly modest, shaking off compliments with boyish good nature. The girls at school found him attractive even before he became a baseball star. In his comings and goings at school, the tall brown-haired athlete caused flurries of excitement among the girls.

Pierce Earle, the best pitcher in Bascombe High, put it this way: "That big apple knocker is so dumb that he don't know that he could have jes' about enny gal in the school."

In his daydreams Jimmy Lee saw himself as a rookie outfielder for the Saint Louis Cardinals, playing alongside of such stars as Dizzy Dean and his brother Paul. He saw himself being given pointers on batting by Ducky Medwick; of saving games with miraculous catches in the outfield. In none of his dreams was there a place for Rena. For that matter, if she had been a boy she wouldn't even be allowed on a playing field in the north, no matter how well she played.

With luck he could become a professional ball player, he was sure of that. Others before had done it, why not him? Of course, his mother would be disappointed. She wanted him to try to go to college, to improve himself.

Right now, he really didn't know what he wanted, except to continue to play baseball and sneak around seeing little Rena. And he continued to have misgivings about his need for the vivacious and lovely black girl. God, she was in his blood, and God he knew it was a sin, but lust, his need for Rena, had won out over prayer and the power of his spiritual feelings.

He thought about it a lot, more than he wanted to acknowledge. His weakness of the flesh made him a battleground of good and evil, and because of his lust he was running the risk of hurting a lot of people he loved. God, he thought; God, why must we be tested like this all of the time?

Although Jimmy Lee was a high-spirited young fellow who participated in all of the boyish rough-housing and games of his day, there was something about him that set him apart from his mates. For one thing he never swore or took the Lord's name in vain. This was not because he was overly religious; it was just that Angus and Sarah Hawkes had trained him well. Jimmy Lee had an inner quality of good breeding that made his respect for his elders, and his almost courtly restraint with all females, seem true blue.

The girls thought Jimmy Lee Hawkes was too good to be true. He had been the subject of much gossip for two or three years because of being Miss Shaw's "teacher's pet" when he was in the eighth grade in grammar school. She was young, pretty, and single, and the fourteen-year-old Jimmy Lee, who was almost as tall as he was now, seemed years older. Everyone knew she was especially fond of Jimmy Lee, and finally, she had gone crazy, and had had to be sent away to a sanitarium outside of Spartanburg.

Though Jimmy Lee had liked Miss Shaw, he had not been able to cope with her because of his religious training. He knew that she was offering to show him life, to give something of herself, because she liked, perhaps even loved him, but he was not ready. He had been afraid, and now that he was sixteen he regretted his fears.

He was, there was little doubt, the best-looking boy at Bascombe High. Many said he was the most handsome young fellow in all Lanier County. Whenever Jimmy Lee walked down the hall at school, the girls' heads would spin after him.

Tall, slender, yet well developed, Jimmy Lee carried himself like the athlete he was. His shock of wavy brown hair, sun- or wind-burnt (depending on the season) skin and slate green eyes were a combination that was absolutely devastating for the ladies, no matter their age.

With all of his physical attributes one might think Jimmy Lee would be resented by his circle of friends, but such was not the case. Jimmy Lee was respected because on more than one occasion he had fought, and frequently bested, bullies; and he always shared what he had with his less fortunate friends, be it lunch or a chocolate frosted.

And despite the fact that he was not an exceptional student or known to be remarkably bright, his opinion was much sought after by his friends because they thought he had horse sense, a practical kind of knowledge and wisdom not learned in school.

He was, as one of his teachers said, "One hell of a hay seed."

On the few occasions he had indulged in heavy petting with any of the girls at school, Jimmy Lee had shrunk from exploiting the situation to lose his virginity. For one

thing, except for his infrequent night prowls with Rena or hunting with his pals, he didn't have the time to take advantage of his opportunities. Most important, his baseball coach, "Rabbit" Owens, had scared him away from random encounters with girls because of the chances of "knocking 'em up," or "ending up blind and lame with the screamin' clap."

Besides, as he had realized lately, the only one who really made his pecker twitch was lovely Rena. Under the circumstances the impression at Bascombe High was that Jimmy Lee Hawkes was a nice, clean-living kid, but not very bright.

Jimmy Lee had thought things through and decided that he had been playing with fire by petting with Rena. It was getting too serious; too serious not to be prepared for the ultimate plunge. He found an opportunity that day to arm himself with contraceptives. Wayne Crandall had to drive into Savannah in his father's Ford truck so Jimmy Lee joined him. Half aware of his problem, he had, that morning, brought a couple of extra dollars with him to school.

Wayne's eyes had boggled with disbelief when Jimmy had asked to be dropped off at the public library. "Shoot, Jimmy, who you tryin' to kid?"

Jimmy laughed. "I mean jes' drop me off there. I got a couple of places to go to. You pick me up when you're through."

They agreed to rendezvous in a half hour in front of the library and Jimmy struck out for a pharmacy just off North Tryon. He walked in the dimly lit drugstore and approached the counter. A white-haired woman wearing pince-nez glasses smiled at him and said, "Yes, what'll it be, son?"

Jimmy Lee started to sweat. He fumbled for words and went through his pockets. "Guess I've lost the prescription," he said, and fled.

For a moment he was inclined to give up the whole project, but then remembered Rena and walked with long strides to a sleazy drugstore near the Star Theater. He'd heard that bootlegged corn whiskey was sold there, and he figured the place would be dissolute enough to sell him a package of contraceptives.

Entering the drugstore, he saw that the proprietor, a large red-headed man, was engaged in conversation with two male customers at the end of a small marble-topped soda fountain. Jimmy Lee walked past the trio and stood in front of the drug counter at the end of the store.

"What'll it be," the redhead man called out without moving from the soda fountain.

"Oh, some med'cine," said Jimmy.

The man sighed loudly to show his displeasure at having to move from his position as he sauntered behind the drug counter. "Well, what is it?" Jimmy Lee was offended by the man's unpleasant manner.

"Well, uh, a bottle of iodine, and uh . . ."

"What else? Speak up boy."

"A package . . . a couple of packages of rubbers."

The redhead man smirked and played dumb. "Rubbers? You get your rubbers at the shoe store, boy, not here."

The men at the soda fountain started to chuckle. Jimmy Lee felt his neck get hot and the sweat began to bead in his arm pits. "Look," he said, grinding the words out, "you know what I mean. I want some safes, to avoid disease."

The druggist feigned surprise. "Oh, you mean, cun-

drums, that's what you mean. Why doncha say what you mean?"

The two men at the counter laughed uproariously at this observation, and Jimmy Lee's eyes glinted fire. He thrust his jaw out and said, "Gimme two packs."

The redhead man was sobered by the boy's anger. He looked like a strong kid. No use making any trouble. His right hand shot under the counter and he retrieved two small tin boxes. "That'll be two bucks," he said.

Jimmy Lee placed two crumpled dollar bills on the counter and slipped the tin boxes into his pocket. Without another word he wheeled and walked out of the store. Just before he reached the door he heard the redhead man call out, "Come back again, hear."

Jimmy winced with embarrassment, but shrugged his shoulders. At least he had the safes. Now he was really ready for Rena.

TWO

Jimmy Lee and Damon Daniels had been shovelling, and then forking, manure out of the stables and into a huge mound near the cow sheds. The white boy was breathing heavily, obviously tired; but the larger, more heavily muscled black man shovelled with a sustained, easy rhythm.

"Jimmy Lee, slow down and take a breather. You need a rest." Damon's voice was a rich baritone.

The boy shook his head. "Nope, don't need to."

Damon stuck his pitchfork into the mound of manure and said, "Ever hear of the Augean stables, Jimmy Lee?"

"Sure didn't."

"Well, you know 'bout Hercules?"

"Guess so."

"Well, I'll tell you. Seems Hercules had to perform a peck of incredible feats to please the Greek gods. One of them was to clean a huge stable of three thousand cows that had not been cleaned fo' thirty years. Man, that place must have stunk to high heaven! Ennyway, ole Hercules he accomplished the feat and cleaned those stables jack rabbit fast."

"How'd he do that?"

"Well, bein' a giant and the mos' powerful man there was, all he did was to change the course of a river . . . the Alpheus, and that way he washed the stables clean."

"Then what?" Jimmy Lee asked.

Damon gave a hoot and clapped Jimmy Lee on the back. "Why, he went ahead and changed the course of the river back, so the king's cows could get back in the stables."

Jimmy Lee thought for a moment. "No one really believes that story, do they?" Jimmy Lee threw his pitchfork, tines first, into the manure.

Damon Daniels gave a full-throated laugh. "No, they's just fairy stories, mythology, but time was when people believed 'em."

Jimmy Lee wrinkled his brow quizzically. "Where'd you get all the stories you know, all the one's you've been telling me since I don't know when?"

"Readin', readin' and remembering. I guess I got in the habit in the army. Cracky, a fellow has more time on his hands in the army than he does doin' time in jail. I got in the habit of readin' in my spare time. Made the days and the nights go by. Kep' me out of trouble, too. I got me a book in my back pocket right now. I read a little of it at lunch and now and again during the day when I get a break." The foreman pulled a worn looking book with a

faded red cloth binding out of his pocket.

Jimmy Lee took the book in his hands and studied the title. "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," he read aloud. "Why would you want to read about that, Damon?"

Damon scratched his head. "Well, it ain't so much that I *want* to read about the fall of Rome, it's that I sort of cotched on to it, started reading and then got interested in it. One of the folks down at Happy Valley had the whole set, so I wound up with them, just by accident."

Jimmy Lee thought about what Damon had said. This thick-muscled black man was just a farmer like everyone else in the county for miles around, but he had more learning than any of them, more even than some of his teachers at high school. They knew their subjects pretty well, he knew, but they didn't know much else.

"I find it helps me in my preachin'," Damon said reflectively. "There's an object lesson in everything, particularly history. Did you know that hundreds of years ago they had black generals in Rome? That's right. Fellow name of Scipio Africanus. Mighty big, mighty big."

Jimmy Lee pondered this piece of intelligence and marvelled at Damon. One of his teachers in grade school used to keep saying "Knowledge is power," and now he thought he knew what that teacher was driving at. His father read seed catalogues and dairy journals; he barely scanned the newspapers; but he was considered a rich man. He had power, could hire and fire field hands and workers whenever he wanted, but Damon had another kind of power. By his own self-learning he had developed the power to survive in a hostile world. He had the power

of comprehension and the power to recognize his place in the world and his own limitations.

The wonder of it all was that Damon and his father liked and respected one another, although on the surface they were men of different interests. Of course, he had heard Damon praise his father for being the fairest man in the county, and he had had a feeling of pride to hear this tribute come from a man he so admired. His father was a good man, he knew, but it made him wince inwardly when he compared Angus Hawkes with Damon Daniels. Damon was a great, if undiscovered, man. Comparisons with him were bound to be hard on other men.

"What we need around here is a friendly river like the Alpheus, Damon."

"You said it. You said it. I guess it's about time to quit, here's your paw."

Jimmy Lee turned to greet his father, a tall, toil-worn Calvinist. A gaunt, plain man, he affected no special airs even though he owned one of the best dairy farms in the county. Tall and stoop-shouldered, his huge outsized hands always seemed to be in the way.

Angus Hawkes had a chronic sinus condition and he was constantly snuffling, snorting, and trying to clear his nasal passages as he spoke. Occasionally he would drop a ball of phlegm down in his mouth, and pause in speaking to spit carefully behind him. He did so now. Wiping his mouth with a red checkered cotton handkerchief, Angus Hawkes said, "Uuum, ah," cleared his nose and continued. "I think you ought to take the horns off the red bull soon, Damon."

"Do it first thing tomorrow, Mistuh Angus."

"Good, ummm, ahhh. Right good. See you at dinner, Jimmy Lee. Don't be late."

Jimmy Lee and Damon finished stacking the manure and bid one another good night. Rafe, Jimmy Lee's nine-year-old brother appeared at the edge of the barns. "Jimmy Lee, Mona says for you to get yo' tail up to the house. She's got something special fo' dinner."

"Hope it's pork," said Jimmy, walking toward the house with his brother.

"Nope, it's fried chicken, black-eyed peas, and biscuits. We got the bes' nigger cook in the county." Rafe said this last happily.

"Wait a minute, here. What'd mama tell you 'bout that word?"

"You mean 'nigger'?"

"That's what I mean."

They paused and faced one another in the twilight. The smaller boy's lower lip quivered. "Everyone else says, 'nigger,' even papa."

"I know that Rafe, but that don't make it right. You gotta say 'nigra' like mama taught you."

Rafe hung his head and Jimmy Lee continued. "You like Mona, don't you?"

The small boy's head shot up and he said defiantly, "Next to mama I like her best of all, but . . . but she doesn't say 'nigra,' she says 'nigger.'"

Jimmy Lee put his arm around his brother's shoulder as they continued to the house. "I know it sounds strange, Rafe, but they—the nigras, like Mona and Damon are allowed to use the word 'nigger' because they are speaking about their own kind. It's like when mama calls some of our cousins and uncles down Fort Mill way, the MacKenzies, 'white trash.' She can do it because they are on her side of the family."

Rafe laughed and said, "But she sure does light into

papa if he calls them 'trash'."

"There," said Jimmy Lee, "you got the difference, boy. Anyway, you wouldn't want to hurt Mona's feelings."

Rafe broke and ran for the house, yelling over his shoulder, "Last one in is a rotten egg."

Jimmy Lee yelled, "You rascal," pretended to run and allowed his brother beat him to the wash-up shed at the rear of the house.

Jimmy Lee often felt guilty about his feelings toward his little brother. Several times he felt himself holding back feelings of exasperation. He didn't want to dislike Rafe, but he was afraid that the little fox had a mean streak in him. Once Jimmy Lee had found him abusing Bessie with a stick and had given him a good hiding.

Other times, when Rafe had been needlessly offensive and cruel to his sisters, Jimmy Lee had brought him up short. "Look here, Rafe," he had said, "any time you get to feeling ornery and rotten you go out and run through the woods until you drop from exhaustion. That way no one will get hurt."

As Jimmy Lee got older he lost his zest for hunting. Now he would bag a duck or a pheasant in season, or draw a bead on a possum, but only for food. Otherwise, Jimmy Lee hunted only varmints, and very few of those. Rafe, however, was one of those youngsters who would pot away at anything that flew or walked. When Jimmy Lee saw his brother shoot a robin he broke the boy's rifle against a tree. "You'll get another rifle," he told Rafe, "when you learn what to shoot."

Somehow along the line, Jimmy Lee had come to believe that it was terribly important to avoid being needlessly cruel to any living thing. He knew about the

Buddhist's reverence for all life, even poisonous spiders, and knew he probably would never reach that plateau of excellence. Besides, he liked pork and beef too much, but he wanted to believe that the animals he ate were dispatched quickly and painlessly.

Jimmy Lee didn't ever want to be unkind to anyone. He had not articulated this idea to himself, but was always deeply aware of his strong feelings on the subject. He was particularly conscious of the slights and abuses of whites against blacks and went out of his way to avoid any redneck mannerisms. From what he had seen the blacks had been dealt a rotten hand by life. He knew that like the whites, there were good and bad nigras, but in his judgment, when people are held down and mistreated, they have more to rebel against.

In a way Jimmy Lee couldn't understand why Damon didn't go up north and make a try for a better life. He knew his father treated Damon like a white man—paid him a white man's salary, too—but a man like Damon was bound to succeed in a big way. He purely had to. One day, Jimmy Lee would ask him what kept him down on the farm.

It had been one of Mona's more memorable meals. The dessert, hot pecan pie with mounds of rich whipped cream had been the finishing touch. As the family left the room, Jimmy Lee's sisters helped Mona clear the table. Sarah Hawkes, ramrod straight, bone thin, and almost six feet tall, started out the doorway, paused, and said, "Jimmy Lee, come into the office for a minute. I want to talk to you."

The "office" was a small square room off the main hall which his mother used to keep the books and ledgers

concerning the operation of the dairy. Now Jimmy Lee followed her into her office and sat down in the chair next to her desk.

Sarah Hawkes adjusted silver-framed spectacles on her nose and frowned as she studied his report card. "You have to do better, Jimmy."

Jimmy Lee had a sinking feeling in his chest. "Mama, I try, honest I do, but . . ."

"Well, if you don't, they're not going to let you play ball next spring."

"What?" There was real alarm in his voice.

His mother nodded. "I thought that might bring you around. You want to play ball, you better get some good grades."

"Yes'm, I'll truly try."

Jimmy exercised the greatest caution with the concealment of the two tins of contraceptives, secreting them in a dry stump behind the cow barns. He was going to take no chances of being discovered. Two days had passed since he bought them and now it was Friday, one of the nights Damon left early for the prayer meeting at Happy Valley. Rena and he had a standing agreement to meet at a bend in the creek in the Big Piney woods every Tuesday and Friday night at 8:30. Tonight, he couldn't wait. He would see if Damon had left the cabin and then whistle her out.

Rifle in hand, Jimmy Lee dashed out of the house, followed closely by Bessie. The half moon was frequently obscured by clouds. He went behind the cow barns to the stump, thought a moment, and took both tins. You never knew what might happen; the way he felt now he could go again and again. Then he stopped suddenly, as if he had

heard a voice saying, "Turn back . . . turn back." He shook off the eerie feeling, listened for a moment, and heard only the lowing of the cattle in the barns and the small noises Bessie made as she trotted round him in circles.

He walked through the deep tufted grass. It was warm for September and lawn moths and fireflies darted and drifted in the quickening darkness. There was a faint perfume in the air. Wisteria and maybe magnolias, hay and burning wood.

He was walking fast and in less than ten minutes he reached the clearing near the woods where Damon's cabin stood. He moved around to the side of the cabin and checked the stable. Damon's mules and wagon were gone.

Jimmy walked to the rear of the cabin, saw a lamp burning inside, and gave a low whistle. After a moment the door opened and Jimmy saw Rena, wearing a dress, profiled against the dim light.

"Jimmy? That you, Jimmy?"

Before Jimmy could answer Bessie bounded up the worn wooden steps to give Rena an enthusiastic greeting. Jimmy trotted over to the cabin door as Rena walked down the steps and stood in the dim light, looking into Jimmy's face. Recognizing the love look, the pain and yearning in the boy's eyes, she kissed him with an open mouth and moist lips. His response was immediate and almost electric. He pressed his erection into her belly and squeezed her to him as hard as he could.

"Wait a minute, love," she whispered. "I'll get a blanket." She disappeared into the house and returned in a few seconds with a worn but clean army blanket. "Follow me, love," she said, darting around the cabin.

Jimmy followed silently, his heart beating wildly,

knowing nothing but desire and an awareness that his blind hunger would soon be satisfied. Rena skirted the old well and headed down a path in the woods. She was taking him to an old slave cabin, now uninhabited. Good idea, Jimmy thought. No chance of anyone walking in there.

In a matter of minutes they were at the small, shabby building. The windows were nonexistent, just gaping holes in the timbers; but the dilapidated cabin would give them the shelter they needed. Rena spread the blanket on the chill wooden floor, worn smooth over the years. She lay down, smiled, and opened her arms to him.

Jimmy Lee glued his mouth to hers. She tasted of spearmint and her firm well-rounded body gave off a scent of soap. Carnation, he thought. The fresh-washed soap smell gave Rena away. Rena had prepared for him, as she always had.

Slowly, carefully, they undressed one another. White hands on black skin, black hands on white skin. He had never seen her undressed before, so he was unprepared for the sheer magnificence of her body. She was sculpted ebony; firm and lithe, with breasts that were full and taut with dark black nipples aquiver in the moonlight.

Jimmy brought out one of the little tin boxes. "I brought these so we could be together," he said huskily.

"You devil," she said with a snicker, "and I brought this."

Jimmy blinked for a moment at the small blue jar. "What's that?"

She answered with a question. "How do you expect to get that big ole thing in me without some help? It's kind of a jelly made from honey an' herbs." She took off the top and proffered the jar to him to smell. He inhaled it; he

thought it smelled of sassafras gum. Putting it down on the floor, he deliberately and carefully took Rena in his arms and fitted her to his body. He shook with anticipation and need. Running his hands lightly over her incredible body, he gently separated her smooth thighs. Groping for the sassafras gum jar, he found it, dipped in his fingers, and systematically coated Rena's innermost lips. He wanted her, but he wasn't going to rip her apart like some crazed stallion.

In making Rena ready for him he had stroked and caressed the girl to a point of frenzy. She groped for him, found him swollen and ready and tried to guide him into her. It was too much for the boy. As soon as he realized that he was positioned correctly he used his hands under her buttocks to exert pressure. One sure thrust and he was home.

Rena had been holding her breath, straining every muscle to help achieve the defloration. As he broke through the tissues she felt a stab of pain and cried aloud in agony mixed with pleasure. Almost immediately he accelerated his movements in what seemed to him an interminable climax.

His member had started to go slack when he suddenly felt the muscles in Rena's vagina grip him in slow rhythm. He realized that Rena was milking him, as surely as if he were a prize Guernsey. He came again. Four times in all that evening, and none of the contraceptives was used.

That night Rena had been in a kind of a trance of algolagnia; she had pleasure from enduring pain and had gloried in giving her lover pleasure, had a sense of power when he went mad inside of her.

Afterwards they walked in silence to the creek. Rena

had brought a towel and together they washed the blood, sassafras gum and come off each other.

They embraced and the silence was broken by the croaking of bull frogs. "Jimmy Lee," she said quietly.

He mumbled an answer and continued to hold her.

"Jimmy Lee, this time was my fault, but nex' time you have to use them . . . them things."

"I know. I know."

She smiled up at him and pulled at one of his ears. "I know you love me, but you don' want to go and make any pickaninnies."

For a brief moment a feeling of cold terror passed over him. Rena shook him. "Don't fret so. All of them don't work. It's a matter of luck. Some times folks fool around for years and nothin' happens."

"And other times?" Jimmy Lee asked.

"Other times, bull's-eye!"

Jimmy Lee knew the answer. It was the one he was afraid of. Now that he had enjoyed himself he started to regret the evening. "We'd best head for home," he said as he looked into Rena's large, innocent eyes, feeling a pang of regret. My God, how trusting she is, he thought. If, as his mother had said, "the eyes are the windows of the soul," then Rena was an angel, a black angel. And then an afterthought: who could hump like the devil.

"What you thinkin' 'bout, white boy?" Often, when Rena played with Jimmy Lee, she affected a thick negro accent. This was one of those times. "Now that you thoo with me, you want to skeedaddle off. Had yo' fun and no harm done."

"I hope to God you're right," Jimmy Lee said and turned and whistled up Bessie. "Let's go, baby; you don't want to get back after Damon."

Arms interlocked, they made their way through the Big Piney. Several times Rena had to pause because of pains in her vagina. "Mmmmm . . . Mmmmm, this business of being a virgin," she said, "is no fun at all. Hope I don't bleed anymore."

The young lovers embraced for another half hour at the edge of the forest before taking leave of each other. Rena gave him one last lingering kiss and said, "We are crazy," and broke away from him to go into the cabin. Before heading for the farm, Jimmy Lee walked to the well, and lowered the old cedar bucket into the water. He filled it and then pulled it up. Lifting the bucket to his mouth, he drank great quantities of the icy-cold well water—the best-tasting water in the world, he was sure.

As he was putting the bucket back he heard Damon's wagon rolling home over the rutted dirt road. He made his clicking noise to Bessie and faded back into the woods with the bitch close behind him. He checked the luminous dial of his dollar watch: it was after midnight. Damon was right on time. God, what a night he had had. So this was what it was all about. This was what it was like to be a man. It was true what he'd heard at school. The older boys had said "Man, the more you gets the more you wants." Squaring his shoulders, he increased his pace to get home the sooner.

The shrill clatter of the alarm clock brought Jimmy Lee abruptly awake. His first thought was of Rena and of the delights of the previous evening. God, he thought, two nights a week isn't going to be enough. That girl has got me crazy. Got to work. He threw on his clothes, went down to the kitchen where he downed a cup of coffee and some of Mona's buttermilk biscuits.

When Jimmy Lee arrived at the cow barns he found Angus Hawkes and Damon in earnest conversation. His father was tracing a design in the ground with a piece of stick. "Now, as I see it," Angus said, "the fence has to be pig tight, horse high, and bull strong. We got to get to work on it right away."

Damon nodded, saw Jimmy Lee and said, "Mornin', Jimmy Lee."

"Mornin', Damon, mornin', pa."

Angus Hawkes levelled a critical eye at his son, nodded a greeting and said, "Gonna put you to work with Damon this week. Puttin' in a new fence around the bull pasture."

Jimmy Lee feigned enthusiasm for the proposed task. He didn't mind taking on jobs with Damon because he always seemed to learn something new. However, with everything else he was doing on the farm he was beginning to have an overlong workday. This was especially true since he planned to spend lots of time with Rena, even during days if he could.

Jimmy Lee worked most of the morning with Damon. First they transferred the four bulls to the east pasture, and then systematically replaced the fence posts with strong timber. Jimmy Lee worked in silence with Damon and two other blacks, share croppers, who had been put on the job.

Late in the afternoon he said to Damon, "Think I pulled somethin' in my back. Guess I'll head up to the house for some liniment."

"You done good, Jimmy Lee. You take care of that back."

Damon and his two black helpers paused in their labors to wave Jimmy Lee away. When the white boy was out of

ear shot, the shorter of the two said, "That white boy works like one of us."

"He's a good boy," said Damon, breaking into a smile. "I taught him mos' of what he knows."

Sam, a tall, light-skinned negro, said, "He work hard becuz the place gonna be his. Nuthin' special 'bout that. When he gets growed he gonna be a shit-ass jes like his papa."

Damon spun sharply and faced Sam. "Liss'en brother, you got the bes' deal you can get in Georgia. Keep yo' opinion of the Hawkes' to yo'self."

Sam flinched and backed away from Damon. "I didn't mean nothin', preacher. You know how hard our life is."

Damon cast down his eyes and said in a low voice, "I know, Sam. I know, but we all got to make the bes' of things. That's the way things are."

Once Jimmy Lee cleared the rise in the east pasture and was out of sight of the three fence builders, he abruptly turned and headed for Damon's cabin. Although he was wrung out with fatigue he managed to force himself to a dog trot. In a matter of minutes he was on the edge of the woods near the cabin. Concealing himself in the woods he gave one of their signals, the bob white whistle. It was just possible that one of Rena's girlfriends was around. He whistled again and Rena stepped out of the back door.

"That you, Jimmy?" she called, searching the clearing.

He bounded into the yard and ran to her. She led him into the darkened kitchen and they fell into a close embrace.

"Jimmy Lee, you are absolutely, completely crazy.

You can't come 'round here in daytime. Someone's bound to find out."

Jimmy stopped her mouth with his kisses and his hands found and caressed her bottom. She pushed him away and said, "C'mon baby, les go to the hut."

"Yes, yes," he gasped.

As they walked through the underbrush, arms linked and bodies close together, Rena whispered, "Walk a little slower, Jimmy Lee. I'm all busted up down there."

Jimmy Lee's answer was to sweep her into his arms and carry her the rest of the way to the old hut. They stayed together for almost an hour in the moldering shadows of the slave cabin.

"Bes' you go now, 'fore Damon gets back. I'll see you tomorrow night if you can get away and maybe we can use it. Right now it's too tender, Lover."

Rena's parts were inflamed for more than a week, but the lovers met covertly four times, though Jimmy Lee kept a rein on his passions and did not attempt to cover Rena.

They were lying in each other's arms late one night when Rena said, "It's gonna be ma' time soon. We'll know then 'bout the pickaninny."

Just before Rena made the observation Jimmy Lee had been feverishly erect, but as her words sank into his consciousness he detumesced almost immediately. Rena, sensitive to her lover's every mood, was quickly aware of his alarm.

"Wait a minute, now," she said in a mock stern voice. "Don't carry on so. So far nothin's wrong. It's probably gonna be a case of lots of fun and no harm done."

Jimmy Lee hugged her close and moaned, "I hope so. Honey, I hope so. Christ, what would we do?"

Both of them knew the answer to his question, but kept quiet. Rena would have to go away. There was no chance of her staying on with Damon if she got pregnant. Her father's strong sense of Christian morality would require that Rena reveal the name of her lover. If that ever became known, both Rena and Damon would have to leave. Only at that moment did Jimmy Lee realize that they were gambling with Damon's life, too. God, Jimmy Lee thought, this is really getting complicated.

Walking home alone that night, it started to rain heavily. Soon it was a downpour, accompanied by loud bursts of thunder and jagged bolts of lightning. "Go on home, go on home," Jimmy Lee yelled to Bessie, and the hound cut and ran. Jimmy Lee put his head down and ran with difficulty down the path. The next thing he knew there was a blinding light, a huge thunderclap, and a rending noise. Semiconscious, he was aware that he was stretched out in the mud, and slowly pulled himself to his feet. Suddenly he was totally alert. His face had been badly scratched by some small tree branches and his head had been only inches away from the trunk of a good sized fallen oak. In the downpour he made a quick examination of the tree: it had been struck by lightning. Was this the hand of God?

This close call left Jimmy Lee badly shaken. If ever there was a way for divine power to be displayed it was by lightning. If the storm had broken just moments earlier he and Rena could have been struck dead in each other's arms. Perhaps the Good Lord was giving him a solemn warning. If the oak had fallen a few inches closer, he would now be inhabiting one of Ada Bell Fanuel's seven rings of hell. He knew that as a certainty. He had sinned willfully, over and over again and not out of ignorance.

He knew the penalties for what he had done, and he would be held accountable.

Drenched and muddy, his face a welter of scratches, his body shaking with cold and fear, he made his way quietly to his bedroom. Silently, he washed up in the bathroom and gratefully dried himself with a warm towel. He fell into bed but could not sleep.

Later, during a sleepless night, he berated himself for having let the situation with Rena go as far as it had. She was, after all, only fifteen years old, but she did have a kind of crazy streak, a what-the-hell attitude, which she must have inherited from her mother.

But what about him? Angus and Sarah Hawkes were good, hard-working, God-fearing people. Why was he turning into such a renegade? How could he play fast and loose with the lives of his—and Damon's—family?

Cold as it was in that unheated bedroom, Jimmy Lee got out of his old fourposter bed and prayed. The boy stayed on his knees for an hour begging his Lord for guidance, support, and eventual salvation. At that moment Jimmy Lee was not pondering the flames of damnation; he was more concerned with hurting Rena and Damon, and of destroying the reputations of Angus and Sarah Hawkes.

He was a leader, of sorts, in school and on the baseball diamond. His teammates and fellow students looked up to him. Now, here, at this time, he was going to have to show some initiative. He was going to have to fight his own flesh, even though he didn't want to. He had no other choice.

For the next few days Jimmy Lee felt like a trapped animal. He kept every rendezvous with Rena, but he was tense and nervous. Although he held Rena and kissed her

for long periods of time, he made no effort to couple with her. He had told her he was "just too worried to make love."

"Listen boy," Rena said to him in her mock nigger voice, "it don't make no difference now, if'n I am an' if'n I'm not. Mebbe you'll bring me 'round."

Jimmy Lee pondered that bit of intelligence. He was astride the girl as soon as he could get his pants off. That night, he used a box of contraceptives and Rena started her period. For the moment the lovers' blind lust drove out the atmosphere of fear and unpleasantness that had pervaded the old cabin for almost a week. The doubts would come again and they both knew it. They needed one another just as much, but their relationship had subtly changed. They were both fools, but Rena was the bigger fool, and she couldn't help herself. Subconsciously Jimmy Lee was, even then, when he was happiest, looking forward to the day when he would leave Rena. It was a painful truth, but one that he knew he must face sooner or later.

He awoke one night from a deep, almost comatose, sleep with a sudden premonition that he was not alone. There was a presence in the room; he felt it. His bedroom was pitch black and then, the moon moved from behind a cloud and in a moment the room was illuminated by moonlight. He was about to have a vision, like Saint Paul by the roadside. He had a sudden feeling of exaltation and cried out, "Oh, Lord, I am sorry for my sins, for I am thy servant."

Climbing out of his bed he knelt on the cold floor and prayed to the Lord as fervently as he could for the next half hour. Fatigued but inspired, he climbed back into

bed to meditate on what had happened to him—if it had truly happened to him.

He thought of what Damon had taught him about the order in the universe and in nature a divine order. It could be nothing else. The sun bringing life to the earth; the moon controlling the tides; the various planets spinning on their axes; the entire cosmic universe of billions and trillions of stars. The earth is a dot, not even a dot, a microscopic pinpoint. To be aware of the vastness of the universe, he was certain, was to be aware of the work of a Supreme Being.

And man, conceived, as they said, in the image and likeness of God, what a complex mechanism he is, carrying the seed of life in his loins. Life was a miracle, life in all of its forms. The grass and trees, the fruits and vegetables, birds on the wing, the snails crawling on the ground. The life force had to have been given its start by an all-powerful God.

A cock crowed, and shortly afterwards, as the first rays of dawn were breaking across the sky, his alarm went off. He had been contemplating God's work and the divine order for four solid hours.

Night after night Jimmy Lee would steal up the stairs to his bedroom. In silence he lit the lamp and slowly ran his eyes over the barely furnished chamber. It did not look like a boy's room. The furniture was old and dark and the woodwork was painted brown. Added to this, the wallpaper was dingy and gray.

For the thousandth time, it seemed, he examined the four large sepia pictures of relatives long dead which had been mounted on the wall years before he was born. They were Bess and Aaron MacIver, his grandparents, and his

great-grandparents, Annie and Sean Burns. None of the portraits wore even the beginnings of a smile. The faces were stoic, forbidding. They were all hard, worn people who had survived through their powers of endurance.

Jimmy Lee never ceased to marvel at great-grandfather Burns' luxuriant beard. In the picture it appeared to be brown or black, but he had been told that it had been bright red until his death at the age of sixty-eight.

Jimmy Lee clicked off the light and got into the old fourposter bed. It was black and ugly now, but it had been in his mother's family for more than one hundred years. His mother, and her mother before her, had both been born in it. The sheets were freezing and he rubbed his feet together in an attempt to warm them. Moonlight streaked through the windows and made eerie shadows on the walls. A hound bayed in the distance and somewhere far off he could hear the eleven-thirty freight train approaching Chillum's Crossing. The train whistle pierced the still night air. God, he thought, that must be the loneliest sound in the world; that old whistle cutting through the silence of the night, passing through like the sound of a soul lamenting that it can find no rest.

He fell asleep.

THREE

Jimmy Lee took his mother's warning about school seriously and bent every effort to improve his grades. He stayed after school two afternoons a week for extra tutoring, but his thoughts often strayed from theorems to thoughts about beautiful Rena. They were back to their Tuesday and Friday night game of "playing nasty," as Rena called it.

Jimmy Lee exulted in the physical delights of the relationship, but it was slowly dawning on him that it was not without cost to both him and Rena. He was sure he loved her, but there was a faint feeling of resentment toward her because of his absolute sexual dependence on her. He was sure that no other woman in the world was so sexually gifted. Rena had laughingly explained it as

"cullud girls have music in their b'iness, ev'y one knows that."

Only in rare moments did Jimmy Lee confront the problem. To continue the relationship was insane and unfair to both of them. Then he would block out any rational thoughts about the future and whisper a silent prayer. He found he had turned to prayer frequently now. Three weeks earlier he and his family had listened to a disturbing sermon on adultery at Savannah's Central Presbyterian Church. When the parson had threatened all the sinners present with the "fires and torments of hell," Jimmy Lee had felt uncomfortable.

Rena was in love, but there was an undercurrent of unhappiness in her as well. Like Jimmy she knew the love affair was doomed, but she was more inclined to let it run its course, no matter where it might lead, even to tragedy. Jimmy Lee used contraceptives all the time except when she had her period and it had worked well for the last six months. The fear of discovery was stronger than the fear of pregnancy and it made them overly nervous. Both of them had an intense need for one another—to couple furiously, to chew, bite, scratch and escape into the ecstasy of sex, but each resented the other.

There was jealousy on each side, too. Even in a backwater area like Reed's Crossing it was common knowledge that the best-looking black girl in Lanier County was Preacher Daniels' daughter. The muscular slope to Damon's shoulders and his reputation for great strength had acted as a deterrent to any unwanted advances from rutting males, either black or white. There were a couple of black boys who were allowed to take Rena to the movies and that was all she did with them. The relationships were boring to Rena and she went out

with Henry Clay or Booker Williams only when there was a good picture at the Odeon. Only then would she agree to eat popcorn and hold hands up in "nigger heaven," the crowded balcony in the packed theater.

Jimmy Lee was openly courted by a number of local white girls at Bascombe High. By Lanier County standards Jimmy Lee's family was well-to-do and the young star outfielder was regarded as a catch. There was something else that the white girls had noticed about Jimmy Lee: in the last year or so he seemed to have matured, gained great self-confidence and self-assurance. Rena had done that for him; given him that cock o' the walk strut. Also, he had grown another inch and a half, and now was six foot three. He had fleshed out too, and when he walked into the school all of the girls stared longingly at the young farm boy and admired his wavy brown hair. Miss Gorman, his English teacher, approvingly spoke of him as "young Lochinvar," and insisted that he play a leading role in the Senior Class Play.

What had firmly established Jimmy Lee as a celebrity at Bascombe High was his unquestioned ability as a baseball player. It was well known that baseball scouts from the Double A league had been looking him over.

Jimmy Lee gloried in being the center of attention, but essentially he was humble and shy, if not an awkward farm boy. One thing he knew he now could do well—better than anyone else in the history of Bascombe High—and that was hit a baseball.

He frequently daydreamed in class, replaying his most recent feats. He would drift off, seeing himself in his mind's eye, tall and strong and very professional looking in his gray striped baseball uniform and his blue baseball cap. It was the most recent game against Claxton High, a

much larger school than Bascombe, and, he had to admit, a much better team.

The score was two all in the seventh inning and Claxton was at bat. Both teams had been held to four hits, one of them Jimmy Lee's scratch single. In the field Jimmy Lee had handled four long flies well, but had not been outstanding in his performance. Now a resounding crack made it clear that the ball was remarkably well hit.

The moment the ball was hit Jimmy Lee knew that he was playing in too close for it. It was coming like a bullet right to his field, but it was still soaring and would have to go over his head. Jimmy Lee ran as fast as he could, throwing a look over his shoulder. As the ball began its downward trajectory he strained to reach it. There it was, immediately in front of him. He stretched and touched the ball with his glove, but dropped it.

Claxton fans cheered: Bascombe High students groaned in unison. Jimmy Lee fielded the ball and then made a mighty throw to the second baseman. Too late. Two runs had scored and "Tobacco Juice" Thompson had notched himself another home run. And Jimmy Lee Hawkes had been credited with an error.

Nothing changed the score in the eighth inning, and Claxton maintained their two-run lead. In the bottom of the ninth however, Bascombe managed to get two men on base. Then it became Jimmy Lee's turn to bat.

He sweated all over again as he thought of the tension of that moment. The game, the entire season's record, hung in the balance, depended on him. He inhaled deeply as he stepped into the batter's box. He had to get a hit. There were two outs and the rest of the batting order was notoriously weak. The Claxton fielders were playing deep on Jimmy Lee for they knew how far he could drive the

ball. Jimmy Lee ignored two badly pitched balls and then took two mighty swings at good ones. The call stood at two strikes and two balls.

The pitcher wound up, threw the ball, and to the total amazement of the spectators, Jimmy Lee stepped in front of the plate and bunted! As Jimmy Lee fled up the base-path he prayed that his team's runner on third would score.

Jimmy Lee's bunt had thrown the entire Claxton team into confusion. It had been totally unexpected and all of the infield were totally out of position for it. One run had already scored when the pitcher reached the ball. The pitcher then overthrew the first baseman; Jimmy Lee ran on to second; and the other runner scored, making the game four all.

When he thought of the five to four victory, Jimmy Lee revelled in the surprise bunt more than in his home run in the tenth inning which had won the game. He was snapped back to the reality of the moment by his teacher calling out to him, "Jimmy Lee, stop your daydreaming and explain that theorem."

Ever since his narrow escape with death when the lightning bolt felled him, Jimmy Lee had experienced an eerie feeling that he was, somehow, marked by the episode. He had a persistent conviction that he had been spared for some reason that he could not now know or understand. Of one thing he was certain. If it had been Divine Providence which had saved him, it was not so he could become a professional baseball player. A large number of the southerners who'd gone on to the major leagues were known as a whiskey-drinking, tobacco-chewing, hard-living lot, but now and again, some

minister's son would make it too, though that was exceptional.

The religious experience he had had in his room, was, he was convinced, supernatural. He was sure that he had been close to death to recognize the relative importance of material and spiritual values. If, as Damon was always telling him, life really was only a short "practice session" for all eternity, then he had better shape his life accordingly.

So many of the traditions and customs he had formerly regarded as important seemed shallow and meaningless. As a graduating senior and a popular member of the class of 1938 he was supposed to be one of the leading participants in the social events at Bascombe High School. Deep down inside, he viewed all of the fuss and bother that was made about going to the Junior and Senior Proms as out and out ridiculous.

Perhaps if he hadn't been sleeping with Rena—driven nearly crazy by her was more like it—perhaps, the proms would have more importance to him. He'd rather dance with Rena, sleep with Rena, than dance or sleep with anyone else, but he was living in the white South and that was that.

Sometimes in his daydreams Jimmy Lee would fantasize about Rena running away with him to the North, or to a foreign country. There, they would do good works, help the poor, minister to the sick, preach to the damned, and build a better life for themselves and everyone with whom they came into contact.

Miss Grady, a history teacher at the high school, seemed to have an endless number of stories which ended in tragedy all because of the mixing of the races. Everyone had heard stories of it happening one time or

another, but it was news to Jimmy Lee that there were so many historical precedents.

According to Miss Grady, the seeds of Napoleon's final defeat were sown when he made a Creole lady his empress. The Russian writer, Pushkin, came to an early and unfortunate end because he, too, had black blood. Alexander Hamilton was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr and he, too, was of miscegenated origins. "Look," Miss Grady said, "at what happened to Desdemona, because she married a jealous Moor." It certainly appeared to Jimmy Lee that the deck was stacked against anyone who would fight against the color bar any place in the world.

There was no way out of taking a girl to both the Junior and Senior Proms, and he knew he would have to convince Rena that it was necessary as a diversionary move. They had talked the charade over after making love in the old hut one Tuesday night.

"So which one you gonna take to the Junior Prom?" Rena asked, a strident edge to her voice.

"Gee, I don't know. Dammit, it's a pain, but I have to. You see that, don't you? Everyone has to go to those dumb dances. Even my mother is after me."

"Hmmpff," said Rena, looking away. She leaned over and grabbed him by the genitals. "I'll cut off yo' pecker if you cheat on me white boy."

Jimmy Lee laughed and extricated himself from her grip. Damn, he thought, she's got a crazy streak; she could do it.

"So who you gonna take to the dance?" She took a stiff forefinger and poked him in the chest.

"Well, you're not gonna believe it, but this girl's mother called my mum and arranged it already."

"Well, who? Who? What's the secret?"

"Elsie. Elsie Randolph."

"What? Well, I'll be a sonofabitch! You sit there on your white ass and tell me that your mother arranged fo' you to take out that one."

"Honest, Rena. Cripes, she doesn't mean anything to me."

"No, but she is the best lookin', sexiest white gal in the whole high school, and I think she puts out."

Jimmy Lee grabbed Rena in his arms and stifled her complaints with kisses. "Come on, baby. You're the best in the world. I couldn't do that to you."

"Bullshit. She could do it to you."

"I'm sure she's a virgin, and I won't go near her."

"Thass a lot of crap. The story I get from the house niggers that work up that way is that she been foolin' around for a couple of years."

They parted with kisses and kind words that night, but there was a real residue of bitterness in Rena. She had to face it. She was a Goddamned fool to get mixed up with Jimmy Lee. She could never really have him and just thinking of him with another girl was ripping her apart.

Rena had been partial to Jimmy Lee ever since she could remember. When she had been very little she had looked up to him as the handsome son of the white man her father worked for. Bit by bit a friendship had developed between the outwardly ill-matched pair which even then, they unconsciously, but wisely, chose to conceal.

Damon Daniels was an omnivorous reader, and although he had never inspired his love for literature in his daughter, she nevertheless retained much of what he had read to her. One way or another, out of boredom and sometimes because of a glimmer of curiosity, Rena had

picked up all of her father's treasured books and read. At the age of twelve Rena had read more books than ninety-five percent of the white residents of Lanier County. Which wasn't much.

Jimmy Lee was enchanted by the pretty young girl who seemed to have so much of her father's wisdom, but very little of his piety. At first Jimmy Lee thought of little Rena as kind of a mascot, and played with her only when one of his own friends wasn't available. Slowly though, without realizing it, Rena and Jimmy Lee became each other's favorite playmate. In time they became lovers because Rena wanted it to happen.

She was a willful girl, she knew, without having her father tell her all the time. She usually got what she wanted and she wanted Jimmy Lee as a man. She had a tremendous physical yearning for the young white boy, and loved the feeling of his firm white flesh pressed against her. She loved to pleasure him and she knew she was forging chains of sensuality on the boy. It gave her a feeling of power when he gripped her body tightly and went wild in her. But she had become enslaved to him as well, and the feeling that she could lose him to some sallow-faced white sow like Elsie Randolph was almost too much for her to bear. Still, she had always known that it was inevitable, but in the past she had put those unpleasant thoughts out of her mind and looked forward to their next reckless embrace.

She didn't dislike Damon; in fact, in her own way, she was proud of her father. She just didn't believe in the Lord the way he did, or in any other way, for that matter. When she had thought about it, sometime around the age of twelve, it occurred to her that the negroes had gotten an awfully raw deal. Maybe it was her Indian blood, but it

seemed to her that the god of the trees, of the mountains and the winds had more to offer than the one Damon prayed to. Perhaps the gods were all the same in the end anyway, but she wasn't going to worry about it or let it govern her conduct.

She knew it was rash, foolish, even stupid to be sleeping with Jimmy Lee, but she didn't care. Their physical need for each other had become a kind of obsession which blocked out rational thought—most of the time. Now, the time had come for clear thinking, however. Jimmy Lee was going out with white girls. She was hurt and angry that he hadn't been able to invent some excuse to stay away from the dance, or at least to have gone alone. He could have thought of something; he couldn't be that dumb. Now he thinks he's God's gift to all women because of all I've taught him, and he's going to play the great lover, the sonofabitch! He'd never get a sniff at her ass again; she'd make sure of that.

Angus Hawkes had generously allowed Jimmy Lee to have the Buick the night of the Junior Prom because he knew that the boy didn't drink. Several of the boys at school, even fellows on the baseball team, had experimented with bootleg corn whiskey, "white lightnin'," but Jimmy Lee had never felt the need for alcohol.

When Jimmy Lee and Elsie Randolph took to the floor of the high school gym envious eyes followed them through the first waltz. Jimmy Lee had mastered that dance; and now he swept his beautiful partner around in circles. Every so often a knot of spectators sitting in the bleachers applauded the young couple. Elsie Randolph, a full-breasted brunette, was no less beautiful than Jimmy Lee was handsome. On more than one occasion they were

told, "You two are the best lookin' couple on the floor." Elsie held onto Jimmy Lee's arm like grim death, refusing to dance with anyone else.

Traditionally at midnight everyone left the high school and headed for Dandy Coffin's Eatery. There, the students filled up on chili and fried chicken. Some of them even drank corn whiskey out of heavy china coffee mugs.

"Old Wayne wants us to join him and Sandy at Coffin's," confided Jimmy Lee to Elsie as the notes of the last dance were sounding. He was sure this stratagem would serve him well in avoiding any complications with Elsie, who had pressed her pelvis into his parts all night long, giving him every indication that she could be his. It had not been unpleasant. She was a pretty girl, not as pretty as Rena, but she had a certain polish that was unusual in a Southern farm girl. A romantic, she read pulp magazines like "True Love Stories," and thought of Jimmy Lee not as Lochinvar, but as a knight errant.

"I'd like to go for a drive and get some air," she said. "I'm feelin' kinda faint."

Jimmy Lee agreed and after bidding farewell to their chums they made their way to the parking lot. There, standing in the shadows at the edge of the high school, a solitary figure watched the young couple walk to the Buick. It was Rena, dressed in her old sweater and Levis, with her tattered felt hat pulled down over her face. She felt her gorge rise in anger as she watched Jimmy Lee help the white girl into his father's car. "Mmmmm-mmmmm," she said to herself, "I must be crazy." As the car drove away, she kicked the dirt angrily and strode off into the darkness.

As Jimmy Lee drove out of the parking lot Elsie moved

over and draped herself close to him. "Jimmy Lee, have I got to throw myself at you? Don't you like me?"

He made a quick protest and placed his arm lightly around her shoulder. "No sir, you're great, absolutely great."

"Well, drive over to Ramsaye's Hill, unless you're afraid."

"Hey, Elsie, what do you mean, afraid?"

"Afraid of me."

Jimmy Lee laughed and drove toward Ramsaye's Hill. There was a paved semi-circle of cement at the top of the hill where petters always parked. Rumor was that many a local girl had lost her virtue on Ramsaye's Hill.

If the truth were to be told Jimmy Lee felt contemptible for not having refused to drive to Ramsaye's Hill. It was rotten of him to doublecross Rena after all of the reassurances he had given her. And it was a species of double sin against God's law, because he had been sating his lust with one girl who had been a virgin until he deflowered her; and now it looked as though he was on his way to shagging another. There was little doubt in his mind that this was morally wrong, no matter how much Elsie wanted him.

And Elsie did want him. She snuggled up to him as he drove through the woods and slowly and lightly caressed the inside of his upper thigh, just short of his genitals. Against his will he started to harden. He swung the car into an empty area at the crown of the hill and as he did so, moved free of Elsie's caressing hands.

Jimmy Lee was trembling with tension. He was only human. It had been difficult to move away from Elsie's soft hands. One part of him, the sexual part under the Devil's guidance, wanted to make violent love to Elsie;

and the other, the decent side of him, only not quite decent, wanted him to remain faithful to Rena, as he had promised. And, as in the past, the Godly part of him that called for the complete rejection of illicit sex, why, that was almost entirely smothered.

"You've never been up here before have you, Jimmy Lee?"

Jimmy had just turned the ignition off, pulled on the hand brake and turned to face Elsie. "Nope," he said laconically with a shake of his head.

"You can't fool me, Jimmy Lee. You're not that dumb. I believe you're a slick article. I think you're getting plenty." She leaned over and pressed her open mouth into his. He felt her tongue probe his mouth, but failed to respond.

Elsie pulled away from him and looked into his face. "What's the matter with you? Are you dead or something?"

"Uuuuh, no. I dunno what's wrong. It's just that the bible, religion and all says that it's wrong until you're married."

A note of asperity surfaced in Elsie's voice. "Are you kidding me? Are you still wet behind the ears? Do you realize what I'm offering you . . . offering to you on a platter? Half the boys in the county would die for a chance with me."

Jimmy Lee was genuinely flustered. "Look Elsie, I can't help it if I'm religious. My ma made me swear . . ."

"Oh, fuck your ma," she screamed. Elsie slapped him a blistering whop on the face and quickly swung the car door open and ran down the hill.

Jimmy Lee was in shock. It was the first time anyone had slapped him in the face and the first time anyone had

used that language to him. Quickly he started the car and drove down the hill. A few hundred yards down the incline he saw Elsie running in ungainly fashion in her high heels. He drove the car a few yards in front of her, parked, and then walked back.

"Come on, Elsie. I'll drive you home."

The girl hung her head and burst out into uncontrollable tears. She babbled incoherently and Jimmy Lee moved to her side and tried to comfort her.

"Now . . . now," he said. And she kneed him in the balls.

At first all he could feel was an excruciating pain in his groin all the way up to his throat. Then, he passed out. He came to, he didn't know how much later, face down on the pavement. Fortunately, there had been no cars driving by, or he would have been run over. Dragging himself to his feet, he made his way painfully to the Buick. With some effort he got the car started and slowly drove home. He was not going to take Elsie to the Senior Prom. That was certain.

It was two thirty in the morning when he turned off the main road and headed the car up the dirt road to his house. Fifty yards up the lane he saw a figure run out of the bushes, waving its arms and whistling shrilly. It was Rena.

He opened the door on the other side of the car with difficulty. "Hi, Rena, hop in."

The girl jumped in and slammed the door. She looked at him closely, her face inches away from his. "What's the matter with you? You get too much b'ness tonight?"

Jimmy Lee looked grim. He could tell that Rena was furious, and he couldn't blame her.

"When I tell you, you won't believe me."

"Take a chance," said Rena laconically.

Jimmy Lee parked and told her what had happened that night, with the exception of driving to Ramsaye's Hill. Rena would never have understood that. He watched her face for her reaction.

"Mmmmm mmmmm," she said. "That is one hell of a story."

"It's all true," he said with some heat.

"Okay, okay. It's true, but she sounds absolutely crazy. Now, darlin'," she threw an arm around his shoulder and kissed him on the cheek. "Let me see what damage she did."

"Wha . . . what?"

"You heard me. I want to see what she did."

"Now? Gee, it's awfully tender."

"I'll be careful," she said and expertly began to unbutton his fly.

"Careful now, honey," he whispered cautiously.

"Turn on the overhead light," Rena commanded, "so I can get a better look." She unbuttoned his shorts and moved his penis delicately aside and examined his testicles carefully. It appeared to Jimmy Lee that she was sniffing his parts to see if she could catch the scent of any recent ejaculation.

"Good God," she muttered in a voice full of concern. "Your left ball is as big as a grapefruit. You'll have to go to a doctor with that. Oh, baby, baby, please forgive me for doubting you. I've just been wild with jealousy over that goddamned Elsie. Someone ought to cut that little bitch up. It must hurt terribly."

They were quietly reconciled and embraced for a while in the car until Rena, finally, slipped out and ran across

the field to her cabin. Jimmy Lee watched her fade away in the darkness, a kind of heavy sadness hanging over him. She really cared for him, really loved him. If only she were white, or he were black.

Jimmy Lee inched the Buick through the throng of pedestrians crowding the narrow road, all of them heading to the white tent illuminated in the distance. Rafe and Margaret Anne were quieted by their mother as they jumped up and down with anticipation. The children had recognized several of their friends from Mint Hill and they were tense with excitement.

In contrast the farmers and their wives who marched toward the tent seemed almost funereal in their manner. The men were dressed in their best suits, most of them in blue serge, and the women wore a variety of ginghams, loose-fitting dresses and dirndl.

The tent was illuminated both inside and out with lanterns and flares. As they got closer, Jimmy Lee could hear a scratchy record of "Onward Christian Soldiers" being played over a tinny amplifier. By now the road was almost totally crowded with people so Jimmy Lee turned into a lot where other cars were parked. Sarah Hawkes gave explicit instructions to the children about staying together, being good, putting their nickles in the collection baskets, and generally behaving themselves.

"Just because other children behave like wild Indians," Sarah said, "is no excuse for you."

Truth to tell, the area just in front of the tent was full of bawling children playing tag and tormenting one another. A large white sign with foot-high black letters mounted over the main entrance of the tent read "Salvation Is At Hand."

As Jimmy Lee and his family drew closer, he noticed that the canvas was in extremely bad condition. Covered in tattered gray patches and held together with ugly, irregular seams, the tent looked as though a good rain would make it melt.

Angus Hawkes noticed his son's reaction and said: "We're here to hear the word of the Lord, son. Don't worry none about physical things."

"Yessir," responded Jimmy Lee. "I just hope it don't fall down on us."

As they entered Jimmy Lee noticed that the rows of benches were three-quarters full. It looked to him as though the evangelist would be addressing a full tent. He searched for faces of friends and found them. There, over to the left, was Wayne Crandall with his stern old father and pretty mother. On his right he spied Adam Fraser, the catcher on the baseball team. Adam waved excitedly and motioned Jimmy Lee to sit with him. Jimmy Lee shook his head in the negative and pointed to his family. At that moment a banjo player and a violinist appeared on the raised stage at the far end of the tent. "All right now," yelled the banjo player, a short pot-bellied man in overalls, "sing with us." The fiddle player was an Oriental, a youngster of eighteen or so.

The odd pair struck up, "Shall We Gather At The River," and the hymn was slowly picked up by the crowd which started falteringly, but as they reached the chorus their voices almost drowned out the music.

*"Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river
Gather with the saints at the river
That flows by the throne of God."*

As the hymn ended the crowd applauded the musicians and the banjo player held one hand aloft for silence. "Folks, I take pleasure in introducin' the Reverend Jethro Parker Hamilton." He then beat out a fanfare on his banjo and stepped aside. From a stairway behind the dais a small figure in white mounted the platform. The crowd applauded. The man in white raised both arms over his head and roared out in a rich baritone voice, "Thank you, brothers and sisters, thank you."

Jimmy Lee was stunned that so large and commanding a voice could emerge from such a short man. He examined the speaker closely and saw that although he was short in stature he had a barrel chest and powerful shoulders. He wore a black string necktie, white shirt, and a worn white linen suit. Bouncing around the platform, the Reverend Hamilton gave his personal greetings to those who had come to hear him preach.

"Neighbors," he boomed out in his rich voice. "Yours is a bountiful, a rich, beautiful land down here in Lanier County. It is clean and lovely to the eye, but," and he lowered his voice and stared menacingly into the crowd, "it is a veritable cesspool. And you, some of you are dung beetles revelling in filth and ordure. Think on it as the brothers play another hymn." As he motioned to the banjo player and the violinist, the crowd took up the hymn, "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder."

Jimmy Lee felt uneasy about the way the evangelist had started his preaching. By the minister's moral standards, he, Jimmy Lee Hawkes, was almost certainly one of the most active dung beetles around. When the powerfully built little man walked to the edge of the platform Jimmy Lee estimated that he was in his late fifties, maybe even sixty. He had a huge forehead which

projected over small, deeply set eyes, giving him an ominous appearance. His head moved in nervous jerks from side to side and his eyes had a piercing quality about them. Jethro Parker Hamilton had developed the stage presence of an avenging angel and used it with great effectiveness.

For more than forty minutes the Reverend Hamilton raged at his audience for their sins. He spoke principally of adultery, venery, and immorality, but he chided all of his listeners for failing to love the Lord. He told them that they must all confess their sins and admit the errors of their ways, that they must be reborn in Christ. There were tears in the eyes of many of the audience, both old and young, and his words had reached Jimmy Lee. The accumulated guilt of his secret love for Rena seemed almost intolerable now.

By the end of the meeting the entire Hawkes family had declared themselves for Christ. When Angus Hawkes handed over a five dollar bill during the collection it caused more than a little stir in their part of the tent. Tired, happy, sung out and wrung out, the Hawkes' and other farm families made their way home full of praise for the Reverend Hamilton.

Jimmy Lee slept soundly that night but awoke to the knowledge that he still had to deal with Rena. There was no way out of seeing Rena at least one more time. He would have to face her and tell her of his decision for Christ. She deserved that. In fact, he thought, maybe he could influence her; convince her to follow a life of righteousness. He thought that idea over for a moment and then decided that Rena would say, "That idea of yours. It ain't too famous." That's what she was always

saying to him.

Lying in bed he reflected on all that had happened to him at the prayer meeting. He had been truly touched by the Lord. How wonderful it felt to have an inner purity! How petty most of his other problems seemed now. It was just like the preacher had said: "If you make things right with the Lord, then everything else falls into place."

In the past he had been like a rat in a maze, letting his physical needs control him, forcing him up one dangerous avenue and down another. Now he could greet the dawn with hope, not with fear and trepidation. There was no longer the burden of discovery, because that part of his sinful life was gone forever.

The Lord had spared his life with a lightning bolt to warn him of just how fleeting this life really was, and then He had placed Jimmy Lee in the evangelist's tent and opened his ears and his eyes for the first time really. God had shown him the way, perhaps for him to save others like himself from perdition.

He sat up in bed, his pulse quickening, a slow awareness coming over him. "Is that the reason, Lord?" he asked aloud. "Do I dare become a preacher, after all of my sins?"

He was interrupted by a knock on his bedroom door. He heard his mother's voice. "Anything wrong, son?"

"No'm," he called out. "Just saying my mornin' prayers."

"Praise the Lord," his mother called and proceeded down the hall without opening his door.

When he finished milking that morning, after he poured the fresh milk into the shiny cans, he headed through the barns looking for his father. Just as he caught sight of Angus Hawkes walking outside, a blur of

red rushed by him—the red bull. It was like a slow-motion picture. Jimmy Lee's mouth opened, and he screamed just as the bull hit his father from behind and threw him in the air. As the bull kept on running into the road, Angus Hawkes fell to the ground with a sickening thud.

Before Jimmy Lee could reach his father's side, Damon Daniels was there. "Jimmy Lee," he instructed firmly, "run to the house; have your mum call the doctor and you go get him in the Buick. Move boy. Move!"

Jimmy Lee took one quick, agonizing look at his father lying still and lifeless-looking on the ground, a trickle of blood oozing from his mouth, and then ran as fast as his feet would carry him back to the house. His chest burning, breathing in deep gasps, he told Sarah Hawkes what had happened and then ran out the door yelling, "Tell Doc Edwards I'll pick him up in a few minutes."

Jimmy Lee nearly fell headlong as he rushed for the Buick, then recovered and jumped behind the wheel. He had the car in gear and was pulling away before the door closed, careening out of the driveway. Hurling at top speed toward the main road, he jerked the wheel savagely to the left and managed to miss an old hen who stood paralyzed in his path.

"God, oh, God, please spare him, please don't take him now."

The speedometer moved above eighty-five and up to ninety miles an hour, as Jimmy Lee pressed the accelerator against the floor boards. Hunched over the wheel, he was praying out loud, above the roar of the engine. He braked slowly as he saw the doctor's house, saying prayers and appealing to the Lord to save his father. "Not for me, Lord, but for mother and the girls

and little Rafe."

Doctor Edwards, a stocky but agile man, was on the road when Jimmy Lee pulled up in front of his house. He jogged to the side of the car and jumped in. Jimmy Lee pulled away amid a shrieking of tires and the sounds of torn-up gravel. Doc Edwards leaned over and said sternly: "Look, son, neither of us will be able to save your father if you kill us both on the highway. Now, don't go over fifty and drive carefully. We'll make it that way."

Jimmy Lee exerted all his will power in stifling a scream of defiance at the old doctor, but calmed himself and prayed as he drove back to the bull's corral.

The doctor examined Angus Hawkes where he had fallen, there in the yard outside the barns. "You're a good man, Damon," he said to the black foreman. "If he had had a broken back he would have been gone. You did right."

That morning, they took Angus Hawkes by ambulance to the hospital in Savannah. There, after a complete examination, it was determined that he had a badly fractured skull and a fifty-fifty chance of survival. All that day Sarah Hawkes and her eldest son, Jimmy Lee, led the family in prayers. Separately, mother and son vowed to lead better, more virtuous lives if God would spare Angus. That night they were told that the crisis had passed. Angus Hawkes would survive.

Late one evening Rena managed to catch up with Jimmy Lee near the cow barns. He looked around apprehensively when she approached him and she shook her head knowingly. "I came for Damon, and he's not here," she said.

"Oh," he said. "You heard what happened, of course?"

Rena nodded her head. "Yes, I'm very sorry. Damon is really broken up about it. When am I going to see you?"

Jimmy Lee flushed. He knew he had been neglecting Rena. She deserved better from him because of all they had meant to each other. "Soon, soon. I'm tied up with my mother and the hospital and all."

"Don't fret yourself, honey. I understand. There'll be time." Inwardly she hated herself for having to chide him about not seeing her. Goddamn him to hell. She was going to give him a quick peck on the cheek, but thought better of it and shot a quick glance around the barn area to see if they were being observed. "See you soon, lover," she whispered and darted away.

Jimmy Lee looked at her longingly as she ran toward the thicket. She was bird quick and deer sensitive, a wild and beautiful thing and he couldn't have her anymore. She was the love of his life and forbidden to him forevermore. There was nothing left to do but to pray, and pray hard.

Rena ran as fast as she could through the fields to the thicket. She wept silently as she ran, choking on her own tears. It was over. She knew it now. She could taste it. It wasn't another girl either. It was that old-time religion that had doubtlessly come between her own father and mother. She had been told how Jimmy Lee had declared for Christ with the rest of his family, kneeling in the dirt before everyone at Windsor Forest. They said that he was praying and sobbing, as wild-eyed and nutty as any of the country niggers that went to her father's church.

She slowed to a walk and searched in her pockets for a handkerchief, pulling out a blue and white bandanna.

Carefully she wiped her eyes and then blew her nose. Taking a deep breath, she strolled purposefully back to the cabin. She didn't want to make Damon suspicious of her personal life.

It had to end, she knew that when she first started with him, but because she was young and in heat for him, she just didn't care. Now she was hollow-eyed with unhappiness, and had lost ten pounds from not eating. Damon had noticed it, too. Her father had questioned her closely about her condition, thinking she had some kind of miseries.

Rena was so unhappy she was almost comatose. She sort of sleep-walked through school and through her chores at the cabin. She could not think rationally about anything except the loss of her loved one. It is very much like death, she thought. Perhaps it is because I have loved him so much, and never had anyone else to love. I'm fond of Damon, love him in a kind of cool detached way, the way he loves me, but I'm furiously, wildly, passionately in love with that boy. Loved the way he talked, walked, smiled, waggled his ears. Just loved him because I never had anything, or anyone else to love my whole life long.

She thought about her devotion to Jimmy Lee when she was five and six. How sweet he had been to her from the very start. Taking care of her and being right courtly in his ways. How could she not love the big white sonofabitch?

She sighed inwardly. I got to do something. No one to help this little pickaninny now. If I stay here I'll wind up singing in the choir, and maybe, just maybe, I'll be able to land a colored teacher or druggist in Savannah. Got to spread my wings, got to fly away from all of this unhappiness.

It had been more than six weeks since Jimmy Lee had seen Rena, and he felt strange about it. Empty. Rena had been his best friend for ten years, his lover for two. He knew that he had to face her, to tell her about his religious convictions, to beg her pardon for having sinned against her and with her. And as much as he yearned to see and speak to Rena, he was afraid.

One clear dry night he whistled to Bessie, grabbed his rifle, and headed out of the house. He knew for sure that Damon was going to be preaching at Happy Valley that night. He hoped that Rena would be home.

Outside the cabin Jimmy Lee could see the lamp burning in the kitchen. He decided to go up to the door and not whistle or throw pebbles at the cabin. He rapped on the door and Bessie barked. The intelligent bitch was questioning why Jimmy Lee was breaking his usual routine. After a long two minutes the door opened a crack. "Oh, Jimmy Lee, it's you." Rena spoke in a low, small voice that seemed not her own.

"I . . . I want to talk to you."

"Okay, I'll get a sweater. Just a minute."

A moment later they were walking through the woods in silence. Jimmy Lee felt tongue-tied and didn't know how to start the conversation. Rena seemed to be in no mood to help him.

"My father's goin' to be all right. He's mendin'."

"I'm glad. Damon says you're working extra hard."

They talked as they walked and Jimmy Lee had not looked Rena squarely in the face yet. He sensed, however, that she was hurt and full of resentment.

"Gee, Rena, I don't know how to say what I have to. I'm all mixed up."

Rena's voice was soft. "So'm I, Jimmy Lee. Don't let it

fret you. It's gonna work out."

Good God, he thought, now she's trying to comfort me. I should be trying to help her. A wave of emotion, an outpouring of love and need swept over him. "Oh, my God," he said, and drew Rena into his arms and held her close. The girl moved into his embrace with the same frantic hunger. At that moment nothing could stay them from the satisfaction of their love. Moments later they were coupling feverishly on the floor of the slave cabin.

Later that night, after they had made love twice more, Jimmy Lee told Rena of his plans. "My Mum wants me to go away to bible school."

A quality of disbelief edged Rena's voice. "You gonna do it?"

Jimmy Lee nodded silently and said, "Life is so crazy. I love you, really love you, and I can't ever have you. Everything is a kind of sacrifice, I guess, for something higher, better, for the Lord."

"MMMmmmm, mmmmm," Rena shook her head. "You sure sound like Damon. You sure my old man hasn't been preachin' to you?"

Jimmy Lee knew that Rena was joking with him, but refused to take it lightly. "It's no joke, Rena. Damon's right and so is my mum."

Rena shook her head. "Boy, you are really confused. What in the world are we doing here on the floor?"

Jimmy Lee blinked. "I . . . I do love you. I came to say goodbye . . . to explain how it is. I . . . I couldn't help myself."

Rena drew him close and gave him a kiss. "I knew it had to be. We've been playin' children's games, you and me. It's sad but we both got to go on. Think of me kindly, love. I'll be movin' on too. There's nothin' here for me."

"There's Damon," Jimmy Lee added.

Rena was quiet for a moment. "Damon is a good man, a very good man, but it is hard living with a saint."

They held one another in silence for a little while longer and then Jimmy Lee left. He ran through the brush with a new feeling of freedom. He knew it was wrong, but Rena's words came to mind: "Lots of fun and no harm done."

FOUR

The early days of spring dropped away in a blur. With Angus Hawkes still ailing there was much for Jimmy Lee to do on the farm. He missed seeing Rena, making love to her, but his life had taken a new turn and Jimmy Lee was determined to see it through. He was reading the bible morning and evening now, had joined the Young Christian Society at the high school and, under the influence of his mother, was now seriously considering going into the ministry. It had happened so quickly, so mysteriously, that he couldn't quite believe it himself.

A comforting feeling of peace and serenity had come over Jimmy Lee since he had made his decision for Christ. There was a residue of some sweet sadness now that his love affair with Rena was over. He supposed he'd

always feel a stab of regret when he thought of her. She was right, however; it was time that they both moved on. His path, he hoped, would lead to Godly ways, but God knows where Rena was bound?

Jimmy Lee was but one of many Bascombe High students who decided for Christ, so it did not occasion much comment at the school. Miss Blasingame, his geometry teacher, kissed him on the forehead and her eyes got misty when she had called him "a true southern Christian gentleman." One or two of the other devout fundamentalist students whom he hardly knew came up to him at school and shook his hand.

Adam Fraser, a boyhood friend, had always, it seemed, planned on entering the ministry. Even as a youngster he was rock-like in his devotion to what he described as "the good book" and the "good life." Adam was delighted with Jimmy Lee's conversion and considered it all in God's scheme of things. "You jus' saw the light, Jimmy Lee," Adam said, "jus' saw the light."

Jimmy Lee missed performing in his starring role as Bascombe High School's celebrated outfielder, but he realized that with his increased responsibilities at home and new interest in religion there was just no time for the less important things in life. Even now he grudgingly admitted to Adam that baseball was a relatively trivial pursuit. The dream of one day being a professional baseball player died hard and he didn't want to admit that his dreams had been childish.

Oh, he knew he was going to miss the camaraderie, the good-natured fellowship of the baseball team, but life, and the making of that life, he'd begun to realize, was a serious business.

If I had been more like Adam Fraser, he thought, I

wouldn't have put Rena on the road to ruin. It was my own selfishness, my own yearnings for sexual pleasure, that corrupted Rena. Adam would have been incapable of that because he is incapable of using anyone. And I did use Rena, he said to himself; there is no denying that. I corrupted her, deflowered her, and taught her to sin. Henceforth, I am going to try to imitate Adam Fraser in every way. And he said a prayer to seal the wish with God.

Jimmy Lee managed to keep Rena out of his thoughts most of the time, except when he encountered Damon on the farm. Angus was back, doing limited supervisory work, and Jimmy Lee wasn't working with the black foreman regularly. Jimmy Lee was uncomfortable in Damon's presence of late. He knew he was probably just imagining it, but he found himself suspecting that Damon knew about his relationship with Rena.

And Rena. Rena knew she was in trouble now. She had missed two periods. She had missed one period before, but never two. She was almost certainly pregnant. The farewell fling with Jimmy Lee had proven costly. In a perverse way Rena was almost glad it had happened. It would mean that she would somehow get away from "the thicket," as she called Mint Hill. She loved Damon but he bored her with his lecturing and sanctimonious ways. She resolved to spare his feelings, to try to soften the blow as much as possible. He would never know about the pregnancy, she vowed.

So Rena subtly conditioned her father to her departure. She spoke of going south to Mobile, of visiting her mother's one respectable relative, Aunt Cissy. It was only a matter of a week or more before Rena had successfully countered all of her father's objections. Damon was no fool. He knew he couldn't force Rena to

stay, knew she was too strong-willed to be compelled to do anything. More than that he was aware that the girl was unhappy. Maybe her Aunt Cissy could help her.

Despite the fact that she wanted to go, and swiftly, from Mint Hill, Rena had a deep pocket of regret about leaving Damon. She did not deceive herself. The chances of her ever returning seemed slim at the moment. She consoled herself that her father had his faith, an active religious life, and the respect of everyone, black and white, who came into contact with him. But she knew how sorely he would miss her, and realized how much unspoken love there was between them.

Forcing these thoughts out of her mind she continued packing her modest wardrobe into the secondhand suitcase Damon had bought her in Savannah. The suitcase was the best thing she owned now. It was in first-class condition, not scratched or scarred and the hardware, real brass, was still shiny and new.

Rena patted the suitcase. Maybe it was an omen. Maybe life was going to be shiny and new for Rena. She blocked out any negative thoughts about her pregnancy. Even that could have been worse. She could be married and trapped into a fieldhand's life. Then she would have to do what her mother did—abandon ship. Now, more than ever, she sympathized with her mother for having run away. She hadn't been running away from her or Damon; she had to get away from Mint Hill. Beautiful, lovely, stifling, Mint Hill.

Rena deliberately chose a time of day when she knew Jimmy Lee would not be in the house to pay her respects to Sarah Hawkes. It was shortly before eleven in the morning when Rena knocked at the kitchen door and was admitted by Mona, who gave her a maternal hug.

"Lord," effused Mona. "You jes' about the slickest lookin' gal around. Absolutely beautiful."

Sarah Hawkes was stunned when she walked in the kitchen. Rena had put down her coffee cup, risen, and walked forward to greet her. "I came up to say goodbye, Miz Hawkes, and to thank you for all you've done for me."

"Oh, come now," Sarah Hawkes said, "we haven't done all that much. You and Damon are family."

Rena concealed the beginnings of a smile at that remark and thought, "I'm family, all right; and so is the little pickaninny in my belly." However, she explained where she was going, but of course not the reason, the real reason, why.

All the while Rena was talking Sarah Hawkes was taking her measure. She controlled her annoyance at the fact that the black girl possessed a quality of refinement, a natural grace that neither of her daughters would ever have. The question in Sarah Hawkes' mind was where did she learn it? Damon Daniels was a remarkable man, but one didn't expect him to have a daughter who sounded and acted as though she had graduated from a white boarding school. What was more, there was nothing counterfeit in Rena's manner. She was real, a real lady, although only a girl.

Sarah Hawkes added a few of her compliments to those already expressed by Mona, shook hands, and left the kitchen. A few minutes later, as she watched Rena stroll away from an upper-storey window, a thought occurred to her: the Queen of Sheba was black and a temptress. It's a good thing she is going away. It's not right that some of the flowers in God's garden are so beautiful and others (here she thought of her two daughters), so plain. That

girl could tempt any man into sin.

It was not until two days later that Jimmy Lee learned that Rena had left Mint Hill. Damon told him that Rena had been up to the house to say goodbye to everyone, but had missed him. "She said to tell you goodbye for her. Made a special point of it, she did."

"Well, uh, thanks Damon. Funny, no one at the house mentioned it."

"She'll be goin' to secretarial school or somethin' down in Mobile. Be with her mother's kinfolk, her Aunt Cissy. Good for her. Have a future."

It sounded to Jimmy Lee as though Damon was giving himself a sales talk on the wisdom of his allowing his daughter to leave Mint Hill. Then, he realized that the man missed Rena, and was lonely. At that moment he himself missed Rena desperately because he knew he'd never see her again, and would never ever again hold her in his arms.

Jimmy Lee tried to conceal his bewilderment, and the feeling that the bottom had dropped out of everything. "Guess it's for the best," he muttered as he spun and walked away from Damon so the foreman wouldn't read the dismay on his face.

In a trance, he walked around the corner of the cowbarn and leaned against it. Why do I feel so awful, he asked himself? Knowing she was here, living in the cabin, and not seeing her was bad enough, but this is worse. It's so final. She was gone, out in the world forever.

In the ensuing weeks Jimmy Lee took Donna Golightly to the Senior Prom and even necked a little with her afterwards, but nothing of any great consequence occurred. Then, quite suddenly, it seemed to him he was

out of high school, a graduate. There were times when he had been sure he never was going to make it. He just wasn't able to grasp algebra or geometry and it was plainly an act of memory which pulled him through. One thing he did have was one heck of a memory.

At Adam Fraser's urging Jimmy Lee approached his mother about his interest in the ministry. "I don't know, mum," he said, "if I'm good enough for it, but Adam thinks I am, so I think I'd like to go with him to Macon."

Sarah Hawkes' eyes glistened with tears of happiness and pride. "If you want to preach Jimmy Lee, if you really want to work for the Lord, then I know you'll make it. Of course you can go to Macon."

Macon, Georgia was the home of a fundamentalist institution, the Edgemere Bible College. Its founder was the Reverend Jim Hickey. For a good part of his life the Reverend Hickey had been an itinerant evangelist and he had won a substantial following in Lanier County.

"That man," said Adam Fraser, "has been touched by the Lord, there's no doubt about it. He has got the worst-sounding, raspiest voice, but when he exhorts the sinners you only hear the message and not the sound of his pipes. He is a fine preacher."

Adam Fraser had been brought up with and taught to read from the Saint James Version of the Holy Bible. As a result, he was always ready with an apt quotation from the good book, no matter what the situation. For this reason, he was the pride of the Young Christians' Club at Bascombe High and further distinguished himself in street corner religious meetings in Savannah. As far as Jimmy Lee was concerned, Adam Fraser was one fellow he wished to imitate, to pattern his life on.

One night in Savannah, a number of drunks had

started to heckle Adam while he was conducting a street corner service. He tolerated their profanity and addressed them as brothers, pleading with them to allow him to continue, but when one of the men profaned the name of Christ, Adam roared for silence, and followed with a quotation from the Psalms: "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him."

The drunks continued to bait Adam and one emitted a cloacal cheer generally associated with the Bronx. At this, Adam jumped off his soap box and started laying the drunks about with a vengeance. Fortunately for Adam, although his adversaries were older and more heavily muscled, alcohol had slowed their reflexes. Jimmy Lee moved in quickly to join his friend in the melee, as did Wayne Crandall and Pierce Earle. In a trice the four toughs had been put to headlong and unsteady flight.

"Hey," said Pierce Earle, smiling broadly, "that wasn't so bad for a bunch of bible beaters."

Adam brushed back his tousled hair. He raised a forefinger to the heavens and said mock seriously: "The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God." He peered carefully at Jimmy Lee. "I do believe they have busted your nose. It looks kind of bent."

Jimmy Lee touched his nose gingerly. "I don't think it's broken, though it is tender and swollen." He smiled. "I do believe it is sprained."

The episode underlined for Jimmy Lee something he had been told at home all of his life: whiskey and the devil are partners. The fellows they had trounced probably weren't all that bad. They might even go to some church on Sunday, but liquored-up they would even ridicule the name of the Lord in a public place, or drive a car and kill

someone. God only knows, he thought, how many people have been destroyed by alcohol, but even so, prohibition would not work in this country.

Jimmy Lee attended all of the meetings of the Young Christians' Club at the high school and, as a result, was thrown into closer contact with Adam Fraser. Before his conversion Jimmy Lee thought that Adam was somewhat of a religious fanatic. Now that he, too, was a religious activist, the things about Adam that had once seemed strange now merely appeared remarkable.

One of the things that made Adam Fraser an excellent public speaker was his incredible memory. He seemed to retain everything he read, and frequently, even in spontaneous conversations, had the habit of quoting bible sources or religious tracts. Yet, in spite of his absorption in religion, he was a warm-hearted, happy young man who expressed great hope for the future. Although a fundamentalist, he believed in a forgiving God, a generous and loving God and he, in turn, practiced the creed, "I am my brother's keeper."

In a short time a close rapport developed between Adam and Jimmy Lee. At first the relationship was one of teacher and student, but it ripened swiftly into a deep and meaningful friendship. Jimmy Lee felt at ease talking over obscure philosophical and religious ideas with Adam which, with anyone else, would have made him feel like an idiot.

Jimmy Lee remembered asking Adam why God even bothered about human beings and recalled how impressed he had been with his friend's answer. Adam had been silent for a moment, then wrinkled his brow and said, "I've asked that question of others. In fact, in the second chapter of Hebrews beginning with verse 6, Paul

quoted Psalms 8:4-6: 'What is man that thou [God] art mindful of him?'"

Adam looked squarely into Jimmy Lee's eyes and said, "I don't rightly know if there is a good answer to that question. I know that Hebrews 2:8 says, 'Thou has put all things in subjection under his feet,' and to some people that means man is to rule the entire universe, but only when he is worthy to rule it. Myself, I think God just loves the poor pathetic human race."

Jimmy Lee was partial to Adam's point of view.

In the last few weeks of school there were a number of parties which Jimmy Lee attended. He was elected the best looking member of the senior class and the most sincere. His mother told him that the first honor was unimportant, but that sincerity was one of the most important virtues to possess, second only to absolute honesty.

Then, suddenly it was time for graduation and Jimmy Lee, along with most of his friends, felt strange and lost about moving on in life. Pierce Earle seemed to articulate the feeling best.

"I feel," he said, "like a fish outa water. I know where I'm goin', I'm excited about maybe playing baseball at the university, but I'm . . . not exactly scared, but uncertain about what's gonna happen. I mean they got high scholastic standards at the University of Georgia and they get a lot of good athletes going there. I might not even make the team, or maybe I'll be thrown out because I fail some courses. I'm not the best student around, you know," he added ruefully.

Both Adam and Jimmy Lee made light of Pierce's fears. "Come on now," Jimmy Lee said, "you were the best schoolboy pitcher in the state. You can't miss."

"And," added Adam, "if you apply yourself you'll have no trouble with the books."

However, Pierce Earle's fears mirrored Jimmy Lee's. Jimmy Lee was afraid he wouldn't make it at bible school. If he was going to be a preacher he knew he had better start developing some self-assurance and eloquence. He had prayed for the gift of the tongues, the ability to sway audiences, but he was still a poor public speaker.

Late one morning in June, Adam Fraser came into the cow barns as Jimmy Lee was completing the mixing. "Hey, boy," Adam whooped happily, "I got us a career, a summer job for both of us."

Jimmy Lee wrinkled his brow, and pointed to the milk pails and mixer. "I got a job, Adam."

"Not like this you haven't." And then Adam explained. Adam's uncle, Edmund McGullion, was a field manager for the Real Silk Hosiery Company in South Carolina and Georgia. He had informed his nephew that if he could collect two other enterprising young men like himself he would employ the trio as door-to-door salesmen. What appealed to Adam was that he, Jimmy Lee, and Wayne Crandall could use their free time giving testimonials to Christ all over both states.

"It'll be great practice for us, talking to people everywhere, recruiting them into Christ's army." His eyes shone with the wonder of it, the glory of the work to come.

Jimmy Lee caught Adam's infectious happiness. Adam really meant it. He planned that the three young men conduct street corner meetings wherever they went.

Adam clouted Jimmy Lee on the shoulder. "You should get plenty of experience preaching, but best of all, we'll be earning some real money to carry us

through school."

The day he was scheduled to leave on his summer drummer's job Jimmy Lee packed his suitcase alone and in silence. As he was fitting shirts and ties into the battered cardboard valise he suddenly thought of Rena. Was she still on the road traveling, or had she settled down in Mobile, as Damon had reported?

He had never spoken to Rena again, or heard one word from her, after that final night of farewell and love-making. He didn't want to admit it and possibly put a jinx on them, but he had long felt an undercurrent of uneasiness about whether or not he had made Rena pregnant. If only he knew definitely, he could put it out of the deepest layers of his mind. Down deep, he was afraid that their momentary madness may have had terrible results.

Beyond that, he would like to be reassured that Rena was well and happy, as happy as the pagan gods would let their followers be. He bent his head and said, "Oh, Lord, this sinner is offering up a prayer for your servant Rena. I corrupted her, Lord, and am guilty of making her sin. Look after the poor little girl, Lord. She's a little negro girl, all alone in the world, and she needs help, Lord, I know it. Thank you, Lord."

Then Jimmy Lee dusted off the jacket of his Montgomery and Ward suit, picked up his suitcase, and ran down the stairs.

The expensive leather suitcase with the real brass fittings was the first thing Rena lost even before she left the bus at Mobile. Someone, and it had to be a black person, had taken it from the overhead luggage rack while she slept. Everything she owned had been in the

suitcase. She had a sinking feeling that the theft of the suitcase was an omen.

Rena consulted the scrap of paper on which her Aunt Cissy's address was written—81 Washington Place. She got the directions in the Mobile bus station, and then struck out on foot. At least she was traveling light and the sonofabitch on the bus hadn't gotten her purse and the last of her cash.

She got lost twice before she found Washington Place. It was in a section of Mobile that had gone to seed, with frame buildings a hundred years old or more, now consigned to low income blacks. She walked down broken brick sidewalks, strewn with trash and garbage. Mint Hill, she thought, where are you? Then blocked the memory out of her mind.

It was late evening now and the streets were all but deserted. But almost all of the people she saw, both male and female, turned to admire her beauty. Rena was aware of the stir she created. The same thing had happened when she went into Savannah. Both blacks and whites reacted like bulls in rut.

At last she counted the numbers down to 81 Washington Place. As she approached the house she noticed that it had a small screened-in porch. The steps were in disrepair and the building was in sorry condition. She walked up the stoop and studied the names tacked to the door frame, until, squinting at the dirty cards she found *Cissy Rainy, 3rd floor rear*. As she started to turn the door knob, she was stopped by a voice out of the dark.

"Where may you be goin', girl?"

Rena turned to seek out the speaker before she realized there was an old lady sitting quietly on the screened-in

porch. She walked back down the steps. "Pardon me, Mam," she said. "I'm looking for my Aunt Cissy . . . Cissy Rainy."

The old black lady sat immobile in the chair, cleared her throat and said, "You the niece from Georgia?"

"Yes'm. I just got in."

"You didn't bring nuthin' with you? Where's your luggage?"

"It got stolen." As she spoke Rena realized her plight. Her eyes filled with tears and she started to sniffle. "Someone on the bus lifted it from me."

The old lady got out of her chair and walked to the screen. She must have been at least eighty-five and didn't have a tooth in her head. Her plain black cotton dress was nicely pressed and had a clean lace collar. She cleared her throat and said, "You'd best come in here. First door on your right as you enter."

Rena started to protest that she wanted to go to her aunt's immediately, but the old lady had turned her back and was walking to the front of her apartment. Rena retraced her steps to the old lady's door. After a moment it swung open. "Come in, come in. Don't stand there in the hall."

Rena took in the room quickly. It was poorly furnished, but clean, with a strong smell of disinfectant and something else, a scent, like banana oil. The old lady pointed to a comfortable looking arm chair. "Rest your bones," she commanded, "while I make you some hot soup."

Rena did as she was told and ate the chicken gumbo with satisfaction. After she finished and placed the soup bowl on a side table, she said, "Thank you kindly, Mam. Now, if you don't mind, I think I'd better see

my Aunt Cissy."

"Sit back and rest yourself," the old lady commanded. Her little eyes, bright with intelligence, animated her seamed, wrinkled face. Rena sensed that something was wrong; the old lady was acting mighty strange.

"Please, Mam, I have to know. Has anything happened to my Aunt Cissy? She expected me and I should go see her now."

The woman covered her eyes with a gnarled hand and walked slowly over to Rena. She stroked her hair and said, "How old are you, child?"

"Seventeen."

"You look more like twenny. Well," she sighed, "you got here too late. Your Aunt Cissy was buried yesterday."

In a state of numbed depression Rena listened to the description of how her aunt had succumbed to pneumonia. She felt no real grief at the news of Aunt Cissy's death, because she hadn't really known her. She regretted her aunt's demise, but right now she felt more sorry for herself. Where would she go?

The old lady seemed to read her mind. "You can stay here for a while until you decide what to do. My name is Rachel Shaw and I was bes' friends with your Aunt Cissy. Don't worry, the Lord takes care of us all, one way or another. You're young and healthy, and pretty; you'll survive."

At that moment Rena had her doubts. Normally a positive, even an optimistic girl, she was badly shaken by the turn of events. Baggage lost, new sponsor dead, and a stranger in a hostile city. At the old lady's urging, Rena willingly accepted her hospitality and bedded down on the sofa for the evening. Things just had to get better.

Several weeks had gone by and no one at Mint Hill, not even Damon, had heard from Rena. It seemed to Jimmy Lee that in his deepest recesses, in the most distant corners of his mind, he was always thinking about Rena—where was she, what was she doing, how was she faring?

In his despair he turned more and more to his bible. "The truth," as the old revivalists used to say, "would set him free." But when? That was the question. He realized that he would never ever forget Rena. In time, with prayer, her memory would fade, he was sure, but she was in his blood for good.

It was mid-June when he took off for South Carolina in the company of Adam Fraser and Wayne Crandall. The three tyro hosiery salesmen took turns driving a battered Model A Ford which Adam's uncle had placed at their disposal. One by one they exhausted the towns near the North Carolina line: Gaffney, Blacksburg, Catawba, Rock Hill.

For the first few days Jimmy Lee couldn't make a sale. He'd be dropped off in his sector of the town and plod from door to door with his sample case. Nothing ever happened. Once in Catawba he'd been chased by a vicious German shepherd and in Gaffney he thought he'd made his first sale, but the opportunity was canceled out when the slatternly customer started to paw him and make unseemly advances. Then his luck suddenly changed, and he was selling as many pairs of stockings as his two friends.

In a matter of two weeks they had worked themselves across western South Carolina and Jimmy Lee had commissions amounting to twenty-seven dollars over his expenses. The others had gone over thirty dollars and

they were all pleased. They were content because every night without fail, they had either held outdoor prayer meetings or had taken part in various church services, usually, but not exclusively, with the Baptists.

At Toccoa, Georgia, Wayne Crandall sold some stockings to a member of the holiness movement. A young married woman of quite ordinary demeanor, she had responded positively to Wayne's inquiries about churches and religious activities in the area. "You 'fraid of snakes?" she asked in a rich Georgia drawl.

Wayne said he could take them or leave them, but later that evening when he joined up with his two companions he told them of the invitation. "It's called the holiness movement," he said. "They use snakes in their worship."

Adam said, "That's why they're called snake worshippers."

Wayne nodded his head. "That they are, but she made a big to do about it being inaccurate. Says they don't rightly worship snakes. Here it is, right in the bible." He pulled out his well used bible and read aloud:

"Mark 16: 'Faith will bring with it these miracles: believers will cast out devils in my name and speak in strange tongues; if they handle snakes or drink any deadly poison, they will come to no harm; and the sick on whom they lay their hands will recover.'"

"Seems to me," Jimmy Lee observed, "that just last week I read where some fellow died of a snake bite he got during one of these ceremonies. It was right around here."

"Yes," Wayne agreed, "the lady says it happens now and again, but she says if you have the true faith it rarely is fatal. Says one of the older men there has been bitten a

dozen times."

"Glory," Adam said with a laugh. "That man is immune now. He's purely a rattlesnake himself, all that venom and all."

That evening, they followed directions and drove down an unpaved country road. The young men were keyed up in anticipation of the evening that lay in store for them. They were normally this way when they took part in church services in a strange town. All of them spruced up as best they could in their blue serge suits, clean white shirts and black shoes. Their only concession to individuality was in their ties: Jimmy Lee always wore riotously-colored cravats, but Wayne and Adam were usually more conservative. This night they appeared particularly well groomed. "If I'm going to meet my Maker," Jimmy Lee smiled, "I'm going to try to look my best."

"Don't joke about things like that," Adam said as he drove carefully through the pitch-dark, moonless night. "Let's remember why we're taking part in this service, even though it's a mite unorthodox."

"A mite," Wayne let out a whistle.

"Well, a lot unorthodox, then," added Adam. "These people are good God-fearing Christians and somehow or other their faith gives most of them an immunity to rattlesnake venom. Some of these people have been bitten over and over again and now they don't even get headaches. I think that we may be able to learn something about faith from them."

"The ways of the Lord are mysterious," said Wayne.

"I aim to keep the ways of the snakes a mystery," said Jimmy Lee. "I never have been able to abide rattlers."

Moments later they came upon the country church. It

was a small square building with an ungainly steeple. A number of battered old cars were parked at random; a few new arrivals were entering the church.

The youths clambered out of their car and walked to the door. There, a tall, fleshy man clasped the hands of all those entering. "Evenin' brother, evenin' sister. Gawd bless you, bless you." He stopped when Jimmy Lee and the others came up the steps. He fixed a flinty eye on them. "Are you-all one of our faithful?"

Wayne stepped forward and said, "No sir, we're good Christians from Lanier County. Mrs. Butler said it'd be all right to come this evening."

The man's smile revealed toothless gums. "That she did, that she did. Welcome brothers, welcome in the name of the Lord. Come right in."

Once inside, they selected some empty chairs in a row midway down the main aisle. It seemed to Jimmy Lee that there were a remarkably large number of small children at the service; otherwise, the congregants looked no different than any other poor white Baptist farmers he had known. That conviction deepened when the lights went up and the fifty or sixty work-worn people raised their voices in the hymn, "Nearer My God To Thee."

That done, the man who had greeted them earlier walked swiftly down the aisle and clambered up into the pulpit. "Evenin', brothers and sisters, evenin' to you all." The minister waved his arms in an outward motion to include everyone in the church. "Happy to see you by the Lord's side once again." He paused a moment, and then thumbed through the bible on the pulpit stand. He slapped the good book when he found his place. "Found it, yes I did. Now, brothers and sisters, we have guests tonight, good Christians from out Savannah way. Friends

of Myra Butler's, they are, and this sermon is dedicated to them. It's from Ecclesiastes 12, and it's called Advice To A Young Man. Here 'tis:

"The light of the day is sweet, and pleasant to the eye is the sight of the sun.' Now we all know that, don't we?" The minister looked around the church. "'If a man lives for many years, he should rejoice in all of them. That makes sense, don't it? But," and here the minister's voice took on a threatening tone, "'let him remember the days of darkness will be many. Everything that is to come will be emptiness. Delight in your boyhood.'" At this statement he pointed at the three strangers. "'Make the most of the days of your youth; let your heart and your eyes show the way; but remember for all these things God will call you to account. Let your heart and your eyes show you the way. Banish discontent from your mind, and shake off the troubles of the body. And hear me now," he paused and threw his hand in the direction of the three young guests, "'Boyhood and the prime of life are mere emptiness.'"

The minister—Reverend Hiram Ruckles was his name—went on in this vein for another half hour until, ending as abruptly as he started, he called for another hymn and bolted out of the pulpit to the back of the church.

The three visitors joined in, singing Rock of Ages to the approval of those standing next to them. Wayne had a rich bass voice which was nicely set off by the baritone range of both Jimmy Lee and Adam. Somewhere in the back of the church an accordion and a banjo provided music.

As the last chords trailed off the adults moved the chairs to the sides of the church, lining them up along the

walls. "Now come the snakes," Adam whispered to Jimmy Lee.

The music started up again, strange discordant music, the blending of the accordion, banjo and a set of trap drums. A sweet-faced blonde girl of sixteen or so moved slowly out on the floor. She was barefooted and wore a faded cotton dress. She danced by herself, keeping time to the drums and the banjo. Jimmy Lee watched her closely. Fascinated, he realized she was moving into a self-induced trance. By then there were others, an old woman of seventy, a youth of twenty, and a fat man with a hook-nose who was in his sixties. The latter spun in circles and kept calling out, "Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus." He kept his jacket on although he was sweating profusely. The jacket, originally black, had turned green with age. The banjo twanged, the drum banged, and the fat man continued his ungainly, arhythmic jig. Suddenly, almost gracefully, he moved to the side of the room and bent over. When he turned and stood upright he was holding a diamondback rattlesnake aloft and singing "Jesus . . . Jesus," dancing in a circle all the while. The snake, by Jimmy Lee's calculations, must have been six feet long. Jimmy Lee measured the distance, twenty feet, that separated the snake from him.

Suddenly, more of the dancers had rattlesnakes in their hands or draped around their necks. One middle-aged farmer had two of them, one in each hand, as he danced in slow cadence, waggling his head from side to side. Everyone in the room was sweating with excitement now. The atmosphere was one of controlled hysteria and Jimmy Lee felt it reaching him. There was a steady, boring beat of the banjo and the drum, a screeching of a violin, the shuffling of many feet. Little children danced

next to their parents who were holding deadly serpents.

Many of the dancers, with and without snakes, were singing garbled sounds, non-words making up non-sentences—the glossalalia, the speaking of the tongues mentioned in the bible. Suddenly Jimmy Lee felt a feeling of nausea, almost vertigo, and then, entirely without volition, he began to chant incomprehensible sounds at the top of his voice. He raised his arms and moved his body from side to side as he danced over to the fat hook-nosed man and held out his arms to him.

An immense diamondback was draped around the man's neck. With one hand he played with the rattles at the end of the snake's tail; with the other, he caressed the snake behind the neck. The snake seemed undisturbed, moving languorously, as the music continued to pulsate. Now a circle of dancers formed around them. Many spoke in tongues while others repeated "Jesus" over and over again.

Jimmy Lee was only faintly aware of what was happening, as if he merely was a spectator at the event. He knew what was expected of him: he reached for the snake. It came quietly to him. He held it up high, at full arm's length above his head. Then he sang in the tongues and danced slowly around the room. He did this for twenty minutes. It seemed to him he had the snake for only a moment or two.

Later, in the car driving back to their rooming house, Adam Fraser said, "Jimmy Lee, tell the truth. You didn't know what you were doing, did you?"

Jimmy Lee was quiet for a moment. "I got to think this over. I did and then again, I didn't. I think the big thing is that I got carried away. I think I was sure I couldn't be hurt by the snake, that I was protected by my faith, but

it's all like a dream."

Wayne slapped the wheel. "Well, whatever it was, you sure made a hit with the locals. Too bad we didn't have our sample cases with us. We could have sold more stockings in one night than we did all week."

When both of his companions cast him stern looks, Wayne said, "Gosh, I was only kidding! Can't you guys even take a joke?"

FIVE

Jimmy Lee discovered that his Christian charity was tested to the utmost at Edgemere Bible College by none other than the Reverend Hickey himself. Hickey was some seventy-seven years old, a fact that belied his nervous energy. The old evangelist was a devil-fighter, and as such, wore a permanent scowl that ill-concealed an abrasive personality and a caustic manner of speech.

He was gaunt and stooped and, had he not been hunched over, would have been six feet, eight inches tall. As it was he stood six feet, three inches. A large, domed forehead projected out over tiny, deeply recessed eyes. *Pince-nez* spectacles, attached to a black ribbon 'round his neck, perched on a fleshy nose, from the nostrils of which descended two prominent tufts of gray hair matted

with mucosa.

When Reverend Hickey had first pushed his face into Jimmy Lee's, the young farm boy wanted to step back, to recoil from the repulsive figure. The Reverend Hickey's breath smelled too, from a mouth full of rotten teeth. Old Jim often bragged that he "hadn't seen a doctor or a dentist in the past fifty years," which caused Jimmy Lee to observe, "Mary Baker Eddy must be spinning in her grave."

At first Adam defended the evangelist, but as time went on, the inflexibility of the college's program made him a critic as well. In faith, academics, and ethics, old Jim Hickey had the final answer. He was the strictest of fundamentalists and he tolerated no questions on the literal accuracy of the Old Testament. Jonah lived in the whale's belly until disgorged; Noah built the Ark; and Eve—especially Eve—ate of the forbidden fruit.

The students were all farm boys from Georgia and the adjoining states. Here and there were a few young men, hill country or "mountain men" as they were called, who were regarded as rustics by the farm lads. They reacted as one, however, in their total conformity to Old Jim's regimentation. Jimmy Lee felt completely oppressed, however, and complained to Adam.

"Dammit all, Adam, we never once have a discussion in the classes. Jim Hickey won't let his teachers discuss anything to do with the bible. They're disgusted too, I can tell. Just holding onto their jobs."

Adam Fraser sighed and nodded. "Guess you're right. It's not the place I thought it was. Let's stick it out this semester and see if we can learn something. Then we can be making our plans."

So Jimmy Lee suffered through Old Jim's lectures,

especially in Speech and Voice Culture which, because of the old man's delivery, was a form of torture.

"Naow, lissen here," Old Jim would commence, balancing on the back legs of a rickety chair. Absent-mindedly he would poke the first knuckle of his index finger into a nostril. Slowly the second knuckle would disappear, and then the third, until the entire index finger was in his nose. Then he would start to twist his finger around, in a search for dried mucosa. His finger would come out of his nose and the hand would drop away from his face like a furtive claw. "Now, you must . . . you must . . . must learn to project . . . to project I say, to project to use . . . to use your dia-phragm."

Jim Hickey's delivery was at the very best repetitive, at the worst incomprehensible. Yet he continued to give speech instruction in his halting, stammering, meandering fashion. Jimmy Lee was astonished and then, angry, about it. He approached an assistant dean, Vernon Whipple, and voiced a complaint about the founder's ability to teach.

"Oh," said the dean. "Don't mind Uncle Jim. He'll perk up and give you a fine lecture tomorrow. He's jes' having one of his bad days."

Jimmy Lee returned to his dormitory shaking his head. He had not realized that Whipple was Jim Hickey's nephew; it was a family affair.

The buildings that were seriously described as dormitories had once housed a state home for orphans. Sixty-seven young men were accommodated in two-tier bunks. At night the barracks-like atmosphere was enhanced by the dim lighting provided by forty-watt bulbs that hung from the the ceiling, naked

and fly-specked.

Four sophomores acted as monitors in the freshman dormitories to see that order was always maintained. The upper classmen issued demerits for slightest infractions and just one demerit made it impossible for the freshman involved to go into Macon for an ice cream soda. Several of the students had fallen into the habit of calling the school Fort Hickey and referring to the monitors as "the palace guard."

The big social event of the fall season was a visit by the freshman class to a girl's seminary a few miles away. It was a source of great wonder and discussion that some years earlier, T. V. Soong's daughter, later the celebrated Madame Chiang Kai Chek, had studied at the seminary. It made little impression on Jimmy Lee, who had acquired so many demerits he was banned from attending the tea.

As far as Jimmy Lee was concerned, that was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. "Dang," he complained to Adam, "this place is like a military school and we aren't learning anything. I'm calling it quits. We were strung along, Adam. The school's no good. And don't go telling me that the Lord works in mysterious ways."

Somberly, Adam shook his head in agreement. "What are you plannin' to do about it?"

"Only thing I can. I'm not coming back after the Christmas holidays."

"Don't do that, Jimmy Lee. You'll lose your credits. Take your tests anyway and you can transfer some of your credits elsewhere."

The single semester at Edgemere College had not been a total waste of time for Jimmy Lee and he knew it. Most important, he was a better Christian, and because of his

close association with Adam Fraser, a more tolerant person than he had been upon entering the religious institution. Although the instruction was mediocre and the curricula third rate, Jimmy Lee's perceptions about life and people had been sharpened considerably. His faith was more secure than it had been, and he entertained few doubts about his ability to make a career in the ministry. He now knew that the expression "It takes all kinds of people to make up the world," was absolutely accurate. He didn't agree with Jim Hickey's methods, his rigid and inflexible fundamentalism, but if it worked for him and those who flocked to him, that was fine. There were many different roads to reach God, not just one.

Perhaps most significant of all was the fact he'd come to terms with his physical needs. In the beginning he had been bothered by nocturnal emissions during dreams of Rena. Little by little it appeared that his prayers had been effective because he succeeded in blocking out his carnal thoughts of Rena, even in his dreams. He knew it was a test of his faith and a tremendous act of will power as he now was at the very height of his potency. He knew he was a stallion removed from stud, and he was going to prove to himself and to God that he could control his passions.

On Christmas Eve, Rena gave birth to a baby boy in Mobile Central Hospital. Two days later, when she and the baby were discharged, they returned to Rachel Shaw's apartment on Washington Street. As soon as she had learned of the homeless girl's pregnancy, the gentle old lady had become a surrogate grandmother to Rena. "Might as well stay on and have your baby," she'd said.

"Then, after that, we'll see."

Except for her increased responsibilities as a mother, Rena had good feelings about the future. She had worked as a waitress regularly until her eighth month and managed to put aside a few hundred dollars. She paid Rachel Shaw a small amount for her room and board and, most important, she had a new beau, who was very generous.

Rena had met Bert White under the most respectable circumstances: at her doctor's office. The good doctor didn't plan it that way, but as soon as the pair were introduced in his waiting room, he saw the sparks fly from eye to eye. The vibrations of their mutual attraction crackled in the air. An hour later, Bert White had Rena in his bed.

Later, Bert plied Rena with questions about her past and her probable future. Rena pulled the sheet up to her chin and said, "You the snoopiest man. I'm a preacher's daughter, I'm pregnant, and you're the second man I've slept with."

Bert looked into Rena's steady, unblinking eyes. "Ain't you the cool one," he said with admiration. And he knew he was hooked again. Bert knew his own value. He was one hell of a musician. He made and spent a lot of money, ate and lived well, liked the ladies too much, and had been treating a chronic ulcer for the past two years, which was his reason for being in the doctor's office.

Rena sized up her new beau along the lines of his own self-evaluation. He was cock of the walk, preening his feathers, proud of his manhood, a lion not yet at bay. What made him more formidable was that he was an excellent clarinetist, a really good musician who could always get a job. That knowledge made him sassier and

more independent than even his good looks justified.

Rena summed it up for him. "You're not handsome handsome," she told him. "You've got a rugged quality about you, a kind of inner strength. I knew you'd be a good lover, knew you were right for me, knew in a minute. That's why I'm here with you."

Bert didn't believe her story that he was only the second man she had had, but he wasn't complaining. She was far too expert at shaggin' and she had the most beautiful body he had ever seen, despite her pregnancy. He serviced her with increasing care right up to the eighth month and then, by mutual consent, they stopped coupling for fear that he might break her water bag.

Rena had become fond of her musician. She fancied him as a lover and she liked him as a man. Despite all of his ups and downs with women in his thirty-three years, he was uncommonly honest and, he had fallen in love with her.

Only when he realized that Rena had gotten to him did Bert start to get unhappy about the future. Nothing about his life was geared to having a little baby around the house. All they did the first year or two anyway was scream, shit, and pee, and who needed that? Knowing Rena as he did though, he knew if he wanted one he would have to take the other.

Hell, he didn't have anything against Rena's unborn kid. It was Rena's and he wanted to be good to it. He wanted to see it born healthy and in good shape. Wanted to have his woman supple and with a flat belly. He'd even pay a reliable wet nurse to take good care of the baby while he and Rena went on the road.

Everything had been fine as long as Bert regarded his relationship with Rena as a sometime-thing, nothing

serious; but when he started to think about her as his woman, then he was in trouble. No doubt about it: if he could have continued to be best buddies with Rena, without long-term complications, he'd be better off, but when you are gone on a woman, you are gone, and there's nothing you can do about it.

About two weeks before the baby was born Bert was injudicious enough to broach the possibility of placing the child with a reliable family he knew. He assured Rena that his friends were an ideal couple and that, for the first few months anyway, it would be a perfect arrangement for the baby. Bert knew that Rena had a streak of the plantation nigger in her, but he badly miscalculated her reaction to his suggestion.

Her eyes blazed with anger. "What," she cried. "My baby isn't even born and you start talking about leaving him behind. What the hell's the matter with you?"

Bert fled out of the house, slamming the door behind him. That woman had a temper. If she had a knife near at hand she would have cut him, she was that angry. Christ, she had to give some thought to what she was going to do with an infant. He couldn't play gigs all over Alabama and Louisiana with a baby tagging along. All he'd done was suggest that a nice couple take care of the little bastard. Guess it was a mistake for him to use that word.

Rena was no hypocrite. She knew what she was and she knew what the world would call her baby, but she was not going to let *that* bastard call her unborn child a bastard.

Bert was furious with Rena, more so with himself for needing her, and with life in general. After drinking at Fuddy's, he stopped off at a seedy little bar, Jackson's, and proceeded to drink Dog's Noses. A Dog's Nose is two ounces of gin poured into an eight-ounce glass of

beer. Though the combination usually brought instant intoxication, Bert drank four of them before he fell backwards off his barstool.

Skinny Jackson, the proprietor of the bar, brought Bert home in his car and apologized to Rena for waking her up. "Awfully sorry, Miz White, awfully sorry. Didn't know you was expectin'. He'll sleep it off, don't worry 'bout him," and the thin man fled out into the night.

The next day Rena was reserved but considerate in her conduct toward Bert. She fetched him black coffee, drew him a tub, and pumped him full of aspirins. Late in the day he asked for a drink.

"Think you should? You have to work later tonight."

Bert groaned and held his head. "I know, I know, you're probably right. M'sorry about the fight."

Rena nodded and sighed. "Don't worry about it. You got a right, but I got a right too."

Bert didn't say anything. His head hurt him and he had difficulty thinking. Rena wasn't being unfriendly, but she wasn't being overly conciliatory, either. That's the way things were until she went to the hospital.

It didn't help matters after the baby was born that the child was several shades lighter than his mother. And when his hair grew in it was long and wavy, and almost blond. Bert studied Rena's baby one evening and said, "Damon's papa must have been one of them albinos. He's the whitest nigger in Alabama. You gonna have to get him a kinky wig or something."

Rena picked her child up in her arms and held him close. "Bert," she said in a low voice. "I can't take any fooling around about this baby. You've been good to me, good to both of us. I'm not going to leave him behind and travel with you and that's that. You better move on."

Bert was furious. He left the house in a rage and went to Fuddy's Bar to console himself with some gin and perhaps another woman. Goddamned Indian was an ingrate, didn't know what was good for her. Women. They were a dime a dozen. Just as young and as pretty as her, too. He thought a little about that. Well, almost as pretty.

Rena took back her old job as a waitress and temporarily arranged for Rachel Shaw to take care of her baby while she worked. It was too much for the old lady, but Rachel insisted on doing it. Meanwhile, Rena was saving her money and making sure that little Damon was healthy. Of herself she said, "I may be a no-good daughter, but I'm not going to be a no-good momma."

Two weeks later, Bert was back on Rena's terms. He had surrendered totally. He agreed to have the baby travel with them where they went and further, to prove he meant it, volunteered to legally adopt Damon. "Slow down, darlin'!" Rena said. "No sense in adopting the baby until we get married, if we get married."

That made sense to Bert. "I'll even do that," he said with a laugh.

Rena kissed him softly. She must love him, she thought. Physically he was a hell of a man, except when he drank. He was good to her really and she had a lot more in common with him than she had had with Jimmy Lee, because he was black, she guessed. The thing with Jimmy Lee seemed years and years ago. It was hard to believe that she had ever been desperately infatuated with him. So much of it had been tied up with flouting convention, violating all of the silly-assed taboos about whites and blacks consorting together when everyone knew it happened all the time.

No, she told herself, she must not sour her memories of her time with Jimmy Lee. He had loved her honestly and he couldn't help it if he had been bitten by the religious bug. After all, her father was the same way. In his time Jimmy Lee had been her love, had brought her happiness and pleasure, and he was the father of her child. But now, she was glad she had Bert.

Jimmy Lee got a lump in his throat when he first caught sight of his home and quickened his pace on the highway. By the time he had turned down the dirt road he was jogging, his suitcase held out a ways so it wouldn't hit his legs. It was almost a half mile up the hill to his house, but he increased his speed. He was home, and soon he'd see the entire family. He cleared the steps up to the front porch in a rush and pushed open the door.

As he expected, the family was having dinner in the dining room and it was there he darted, calling out, "Ain't anybody home in this place? The wandering boy, the prodigal son, has come home."

Little Rafe reached him first and jumped up and hugged him. Then the girls, Janie Lou and Margaret Anne, embraced him and finally, Sarah Hawkes held her eldest in her arms. After kissing his mother, Jimmy Lee moved to the head of the table where his father sat quietly. Angus Hawkes, wan and drawn, smiled and said, "You look fine, Jimmy Lee, jes' fine."

"You do too, Pa. You're coming right along."

"Well, yes," his father said, nodding seriously. "I've been slow mending but the doctor says that I been showing real progress."

Moments later, Jimmy Lee was stowing away some of Mona's delectable food and frequently talking with his

mouth full.

"That Edgemere Bible College hasn't improved your manners any," his mother said with her nose elevated.

"Uh, oh, sorry mother. It's just that I'm famished. Haven't eaten like this since I left."

To himself Jimmy Lee marvelled at the changes that had taken place in the short time he had been away. With Angus Hawkes still weak and convalescent, his mother was clearly running the family, in charge in every way. The two girls looked more like young ladies than the rural hoydens they had been when he had left, and young Rafe had grown a couple of inches. Time waits on no man, they said. How true it is, he thought. I've changed too. They've all grown older, but their ties to one another remain the same. Mine, however, have slackened because I've been out in the world, and now, although I'm part of the family, I'm just a little bit of an outsider. When I go away again, I'll be more of an outsider, while they stay here locked together on the farm.

Sarah Hawkes was determined that her son would not end up in the wrong school a second time. "Adam Fraser is a good lad," she said, "but we mustn't rely on him to find the proper place for you." For the next few weeks she made inquiries and wrote letters. In mid-January she called Jimmy Lee into her office and said, "Son, I've found it. I think this one will do. The Samaritan Bible Institute. It's in Sarasota, Florida."

Late in January Adam Fraser and Jimmy Lee arrived in Sarasota on a Greyhound bus. It was the height of the tourist season and the city was crowded with vacationers. It was apparent to Jimmy Lee that if a student desired worldly distractions there were plenty of them in

Sarasota, including pretty girls. He felt himself searching the bodies of women with hungry eyes and then, when he realized what he was doing, he forced his eyes away, only to return to the study of lightly-clothed, undulating flesh. It had been almost ten months since Jimmy Lee had had a woman and his glands seemed to groan for relief.

His faith required absolute repression of his sexual appetite until he took a wife, and that, he was afraid, was going to be some time away. After discussions with a counselor at Edgemere College, Jimmy Lee had hewn to a system of prayer, exercise, and icy cold showers to keep himself out of rut. Unfortunately, the prescription was not completely effective and once more Jimmy Lee was suffering from insomnia and recurring nocturnal emissions. These he found particularly distasteful, because they made him painfully disappointed in himself, and they were messy and required that he scour his pyjamas and sheets.

One aspect of the Samaritan Bible Institute that interested Adam and Jimmy Lee greatly was that it was coeducational. Of its hundred and twenty students, approximately half were young ladies. None of the girls were what Jimmy Lee or Adam would describe as "spectacular beauties," but there were several young women who were inordinately handsome, and could, with care and grooming, become exceptionally attractive.

One of such women who ultimately blossomed into a beauty was Winifred Judge. Winny was an exceptional student, the daughter of a Baptist minister from Fort Walton in northwest Florida. A charming, outgoing southern belle, she was cultivated by both males and females at the seminary as much for her intelligence as for her beauty.

Adam and Jimmy Lee were frequently thrown into contact with her. They often sat together in Dean Padget's lectures in Practical Theology, and in Church History and Missions. Winny divided her interest evenly between them, and tried not to show one or the other disproportionate attention.

The two young men were lyrical in their praises of the Bible Institute. It was more than they had ever hoped for. Compared to the coarse and spartan life at Edgemere College they were literally living in luxury. Each had a private room where they could study and do as they chose, and both showed improvement as students. They were now competitors on the golf course as well as in the classroom. Jimmy Lee's coordination, which was highly developed as a baseball player, now served him well on the links.

The golf course became a focal point for Jimmy Lee. Some part of the day he played, or caddied for others; by night he walked the fairways and greens practicing his preaching, meditating, and praying. More than anything he wanted to become an effective public speaker, but a smooth, impressive delivery seemed to elude him. He was a stutterer and stammerer, a hemmer and a hawer, and his delivery could be summed up in one word: boring.

Like Adam Fraser he studied all of his courses, but the will to improve his elocution was uppermost in his mind.

One star-lit night he ran into Winny strolling by herself on a fairway. They exchanged greetings and walked toward the school. Inevitably, Jimmy Lee got around to explaining his predicament as a public speaker.

"I've watched you in class," Winny said. "I think you tend to race through your material. You have to go slower, dramatize yourself more, *feel* the material."

Winny's words smote him like a blow in the face. "You are right, Winny, so right. I've been worrying about the words, not what the words mean. My delivery lacks sincerity. Say, you're a fine teacher, Winny. Would you coach me? Then, I'll coach you."

From then on, Winny and Jimmy Lee wandered out on the golf course to practice elocution three or four nights a week. Of all their classmates, only Adam Fraser reacted negatively when he learned of their system, and jestingly said, "Jimmy Lee, take care now, you are triflin' with my girl."

When Jimmy Lee shot a look at Winny to confirm this she laughed nervously and flushed pink for a moment. "I'm nobody's girl and I'll help anyone do the Lord's work."

Without really knowing why, Jimmy Lee received some comfort from Winny's words. After strolling over the fairways, practicing what they preached for a few evenings, the young friends fell into the habit of lightly holding hands. Another week or two and their arms were linked together. Winny was a no-nonsense, down-to-earth type, and one night when they were walking she stopped, put both her hands on her hips and said, "Jimmy Lee, I like you a lot, you like me a lot, so don't just stand there: give me a kiss."

Jimmy Lee was momentarily nonplussed. He hadn't ever figured on being able to kiss Winny. One sensed great well springs of integrity and moral character in the girl. The way she talked while looking you squarely in the eye put everyone on notice that they were dealing with a strong personality not easily swayed by anything.

She made a little sound as Jimmy Lee gathered her in

his arms and drew her close. Her mouth was soft, pliant, and responsive. They embraced frequently after that, but did not indulge in what the others described as "heavy petting," nor did they caress because Winny subtly indicated that Jimmy Lee was to restrict himself solely to kissing.

It nettled him that Winny had a firm rein on her passions. She seemed willing enough to go all the way when they first started to embrace, but when she whispered goodnight she had been cool and self-possessed. Jimmy Lee, on the other hand, was literally in a sweat and his lower groin and testicles ached.

The ache continued for several months as Winny steadfastly refused to give up her chastity. At least part of the time Jimmy Lee sincerely was trying to control himself and resorted to prayer in that effort. It dawned on him that the only way he was going to be able to bed down Miss Winny was to marry the girl. He considered this fact for some time and came to a decision. For their own good, for both their sakes, he would put an end to their relationship.

When he told her the following night, he could see her eyes blaze in the moonlight. She ground her teeth together and said, "I know when I'm not wanted," in a low, breathless sort of way. She turned on her heel and stalked off into the night. Jimmy Lee patted his bible against his leg and struck out in long strides in the opposite direction. Oh, it was good to be free!

In New Orleans, Bert White was coaching Rena on what he called a "surefire method" of singing. "All you got to do is speak the words soft-like, in that itty-bitty breathless way you do. Kinda whine 'em out. It's that

phrasin' that'll do it. You'll come across great."

They were sitting in a French Quarter bar celebrated for its negro music, The Five Spot. The big cluttered room was half full. The crowd was mostly whites at that hour, about midnight. Later, black musicians from other clubs would drift in. For the moment a trio—piano, drums and bass—were sending gentle rhythmic vibrations through everyone in the club whether they listened carefully or not. "Thunk . . . a thunk . . . thunk a thuuuuunk," went the bass, while the white drummer brushed his skins and the black pianist hit the white keys.

Quietly another musician moved onto the stage and the group became a quartet. It was Bert with his clarinet and very quickly they ran through a medley of tunes. The room was still in semi-darkness when a spotlight picked up a black woman vocalist picking her way through the tables and heading for the stage. She wore a low-cut pearl-white, crepe de chine evening gown which fit her like the skin of a ripe peach. When she walked everything moved and she clearly wore no brassiere, no underwear at all.

As she reached the stage and stepped in front of the combo she did her phrasing chant, syncopating in breaks of the music: "Vo de oh de . . . oh vo de oh doooooooohhhhhh," and then sang Bert's version of "A Russian Lullaby." She had a limited repertoire, a few of the old standards, a few Gershwin and Cole Porter tunes and a couple of new songs she had recently picked up. But if she was weak musically, she had everything else and more to succeed as a vocalist.

Bubba Williams, the quartet's manager and piano player, summed it up: "Baby, you got class and you got ass and oodles of both. They'll be crazy about you. You just work on your delivery, give us a little quivery lip and

breathless voice and we'll be packin' 'em in."

Rena learned her trade at The Five Spot. In her way she became as good a vocalist as Bert, Bubba and the others were musicians. She was now strikingly beautiful. Her hair was gracefully but simply coiffed in waves off the face; her expression sweet and dewy-eyed, her rich full mouth shaping her words slowly and softly. There was a pure, virginal effect as long as one fixed on her face, but if the spectator's eyes strayed to her body, his passions would have to be aroused. Her movements, although ever so slight, spoke of one thing only.

Bubba said, "Rena, the only gal I know who could move like you was the famous 'Rope Tit' Annie Brown. She had a following for years, not because of her voice, but because she moved so well."

Rena made a face. "I want them to remember my voice, too."

Bubba smiled, "They will, they will. Keep workin' on it, but in the meantime, don't ever stop shakin' the bacon."

"So you think I can make it?" Rena asked.

"Baby," Bubba smiled, "you have made it. You a singer."

Rena felt her spirits soar and beamed with pleasure. "So," she said, raising her hands as if to clap, "let's have a big hand for the little girl from Mint Hill. You know, don't you, Bubba, I'm right off the farm?"

"And fresh as the early mornin' dew," he laughed.

If what Bubba said were true, she thought to herself, she had a way of making some money wherever she went. She liked to sing, enjoyed being the center of attention, have the spotlight play on her. She got a deep feeling of satisfaction from performing. It was also a lot better than

waiting on tables. She never thought she could perform, but Bert recognized her talent and had carried her along and worked on her. Now she was gaining confidence and her singing was improving.

Life is funny, she reflected. She had had mixed feelings about following Bert to New Orleans with little Damon, but it turned out to be the best thing that had ever happened. Now she was somebody. People liked her and wanted her; their applause warmed and thrilled her. I'm going to work on my singing, she vowed, and make it better and better.

SIX

Adam and Winifred Judge announced their engagement three months later. At the end of the term Adam took his fiancee off to Mint Hill to meet his mother. Winny made it clear to Jimmy Lee that they could still be good friends. "I believe," she said with a malicious cast to her eye, "that I am getting myself a good man."

"The best," added Jimmy Lee, meaning it.

He continued to stalk the fairways of the golf course by night, alternately praying and practicing his preaching, sometimes in undertones and at others at the top of his lungs. On one such moonlit night he ran into Winny on the lip of the fourteenth green, which had been their favorite place for their most intense petting sessions.

"Evenin', Jimmy Lee," Winny called out. "How's the

practice going?"

Jimmy Lee smiled. "Better, thanks to you. Where's Adam?"

She said a trifle wistfully, Jimmy Lee thought, "At a preacher's clinic in Tampa."

"Oh, he went down to that, did he?"

Winny was silent for a moment and then said, "Can we talk, Jimmy Lee?"

"Why, sure thing, Winny. Let's sit down here," he pointed to a grassy mound where the green became a bunker.

They sat down close together on the bunker and Jimmy Lee studied her face in the moonlight. She was a pretty girl, and he had enjoyed necking with her, but she was Adam Fraser's fiancee, so he must put it out of his mind.

"Oh, Jimmy Lee, I don't know how to begin. I . . . I'm just mortified." Her eyes filled with tears, her mouth quivered and she was sobbing as she fell into his arms.

Without realizing it Jimmy Lee was kissing her on the cheek, patting her head, and holding her close. "There, there . . . everything will be all right."

The tears were pouring down her face now. "Oh, Jimmy Lee," she sobbed, "I . . . I . . . don't know what to do. Adam . . . Adam . . . is too much of a saint. He . . . he . . . doesn't really want me as a . . . as a man. He doesn't even kiss me." Having managed that outpouring of words amidst tears, Winny turned and drew Jimmy Lee's face down to her own. Her mouth opened and closed hungrily around his, her tongue darting in and out.

Jimmy Lee's resolution never to touch Winny again melted in the face of her warm reception. She moaned and pressed her body against his as his hands swiftly

moved to cover her breasts, her belly, her thighs, and the central target. She moaned again and said "Oh yes," when Jimmy Lee hoisted her up lightly and peeled off her panties. She clung to him, kissing him on the lips as he made himself ready to penetrate her, but try as he might, he was unable to get through her hymen. Winny was aroused, cooperative and ready, but her parts were bone-dry. Worse, Jimmy Lee couldn't find where the parts fit together, where the aperture was. Delicately and carefully, he tried to force his way through but to no avail.

Through all of Jimmy Lee's attempts Winny had been ardent but silent. Now she whispered, "Hold me close, Jimmy Lee."

He did as he was instructed and Winny manipulated him in mutual masturbation and they both reached a climax together. "There," she said, "that wasn't so bad, was it?"

Jimmy Lee's first thought was not so bad, but not so good either. He thought longingly of Rena. As Winny clutched him to her in close embrace, he somehow experienced a feeling of revulsion. He had sinned against God and sinned against his friend in a very unsatisfying episode.

"You don't hate me, do you?" Winny asked in a low voice.

"Of course not," Jimmy Lee whispered. "We're all just flesh and blood. We can only win our battles with the devil so often. Besides, we didn't go all the way." He paused a moment and said, "You can't, can you?"

She hugged Jimmy Lee to her and in a small voice said, "Oh, Jimmy Lee, I could just die. I need surgery down there. I've got a kind of fused pelvis. My daddy won't

have me operated on until the wedding's date been set."

"Why, that's barbaric. I've never heard of such a thing," Jimmy Lee said, but thought to himself it was mighty effective.

Winny Judge, however, was determined to transfer her affections to him and when she next managed to get him alone immediately broached the question of how she should best break the bad news to Adam. At this Jimmy Lee became genuinely alarmed. This pink-cheeked, clear-eyed, technical virgin was as strong-willed as the women in his family and her strength of character was extremely unsettling. The romp in the bunker had made Winny feel that she and Jimmy were back on a serious romantic footing once again. Some way, somehow, Jimmy Lee had to dissuade Winny.

The opportunity presented itself two nights later as they strolled down the fairway. Jimmy Lee had dwelt on the problem at length and decided that the noble approach was the only way to extricate himself from this girl who, he knew, would hang on like a limpet. He was a great admirer of Charles Dickens and one of his favorite books was *A Tale of Two Cities*. And so he planned to adapt the Sidney Carton character to achieve his freedom from Winny. In a way, he told himself, what he was doing was not sham. He really felt that he should be noble. Well, perhaps not as noble as all that, but . . .

Jimmy Lee's right arm was clasped around Winny's trim waist. As he leaned over and kissed her hair the smell of carnations excited him. "Winny, baby," he said tentatively.

"Mmmmm, yes, Jimmy Lee."

"We got to talk about things."

"I know, darlin'. I truly know."

He stopped and squeezed her to him with all his might. "Please, please, Jimmy Lee. I can't breathe. Let me go."

Jimmy Lee shook his head violently. "No, no, I never want to let you go, and yet . . ."

Winny stopped her protestations. "Yet, what?" she asked in a flat voice.

Jimmy Lee shot a look at Winny and saw that the girl's face held a look that was simultaneously suspicious and resentful.

"What kind of luck can we ever have? One would-be preacher stealing another's future wife. It's just so rotten, and me growing up with Adam and all."

Winny put both hands on her hips and fumed. "Are you trying to pull that old bull on me again?"

Jimmy Lee tried his best to feign shock. "Why Winny, what do you mean? I'm barin' my heart to you. You know in your heart that we've done wrong. I'm finding it hard to live with, that's all."

Winny looked him squarely, unflinchingly, in the eyes and said, "There's just one way to clear things up with the Lord, with Adam, with me. We'll get married as soon as we can. Be open and aboveboard with everyone."

"Yes," Jimmy Lee nodded his head. "There is that way, but we have sinned and Adam has not. Adam is not the one who should suffer."

Winny's eyes blazed. "Oho, but I should suffer, hey? I should marry him instead of you, huh?"

Jimmy Lee smiled and became expansive. "You flatter me, Winny." He made a move to take her in his arms, but she stepped back, eluding him. "Winny," he pleaded. "Try to understand. The Lord won't let me rest if I do this to Adam." In this statement Jimmy Lee was sincere.

He truly loved Adam Fraser and he did not want to hurt him.

"Adam is the best man, the best person I've ever met," Jimmy Lee said huskily, "and I'd rather die than hurt him."

"It's a little late to talk like that. You've had your cake."

"I have sinned," Jimmy Lee intoned. "Sinned greatly and I'll have to make amends. I beg your forgiveness." He held out both his large hands in a gesture of supplication.

"Ooooooh, Jimmy Lee," Winny groaned aloud in irritation. "You are such an actor . . . such a . . . a phony." She turned and raced away up the fairway.

Jimmy Lee was elated, but just a bit piqued. A "phony" she had called him. An actor maybe, but never a phony. He squared his shoulders and went off in the other direction, his long strides carrying him swiftly away from Winny.

A short time afterwards, with his family's approval, Jimmy Lee became a Unified Baptist at a ceremony held on the banks of the Miakka River. He was baptized, along with Adam Fraser, in that muddy stream late in November, 1938, and ordained a Baptist minister two months later, though still a student.

That next spring Adam Fraser and Winny Judge were married in the chapel of the Bible Institute. Jimmy Lee was best man. For a time Adam had insisted that the ceremony be performed by his pal Jimmy Lee, but both Jimmy Lee and Winny insisted that Dr. Padgett be allowed to perform the marriage. Everyone said it was a lovely wedding, full of beautiful girls and handsome

young men.

For his part Jimmy Lee wondered when Winny would arrange the minor surgery required to defuse her pelvis. She hadn't left school for any extended time, and he hoped for Adam's sake that her parts would one day be in order.

One afternoon near the close of the spring term Dr. Padget asked Jimmy Lee to come to his office where he introduced him to a large, genial looking man. "Jimmy Lee," said Dr. Padget, "I want you to meet an old friend of mine, Dr. Winthrop T. Burbridge.

"We've been talking over your career," Dr. Padget said. "We both think that it's time for you to move on. I'm proud of this little school, but we don't have the facilities or the teachers that other schools, larger ones, can provide. We both think you should devote more time to receiving a really substantial education."

Things were happening too fast for Jimmy Lee to absorb them.

"You see," said Dr. Burbridge, "I'm the president of Glen Ellyn College up in Illinois and, frankly, we'd love to have you for a while. Give you a scholarship, get you part-time jobs, help you out. What do you say?"

Jimmy Lee's spirits soared. "I say," he said quickly, "yes, and thank you both and thank the Good Lord for watching over me." His eyes glistened with glad tears.

That summer, back at Mint Hill, Damon stopped Jimmy Lee the first day he returned from school and greeted him warmly. "Sonny," he said, shaking his hand, "I've been praying for you, for your success as a preacher—"

"What do you hear from Rena, Damon?"

The old man frowned before answering. "She got married. Got married to a musician in New Orleans. She plans to bring him up here to meet me, when they can get free. They're both workin'."

"Gee," Jimmy Lee gasped in genuine surprise. "That's great news. And she's working, too? What does she do?"

"She's a singer," Damon said noncommittally.

"A singer?" Jimmy Lee repeated in perplexity. "What kind of singer?"

"She didn't say, but I guess it's with her husband in a dance band, or some thing."

Jimmy Lee was impressed. His little Rena singing in public and married now, too. It was hard to believe.

At that moment Rena was in a total rage at her common-law husband, Bert White. She shrieked so loud and hard that the veins stood out on her forehead and the cords bulged on her throat. "You filthy, no-good, son-ovabitch," she screamed. "You knew you had gonorrhea two weeks ago and you didn't tell me."

Bert was sitting in a chair holding his face in his hands. "Not right, not right at all. I thought I had a strain. A strain, that's all."

Bert watched Rena walk toward the dining room table which was spread for dinner. A large turkey and several platters of vegetables were getting cold, but what made him nervous was the presence of a large and very sharp carving knife. Rena struck the table with her fist. "Why, why didn't you tell me when you got the symptoms? You knew you'd been with one of your pigs. You knew it had to be the clap. You knew. You knew."

"I didn't know," Bert got out of the chair and started

to walk toward Rena. "I was drunk when I went with her."

Rena moved like a flash. "Stay away from me, you lousy bastard." Her hand moved to the table and came up with a heavy two-pronged serving fork. She raised her arm and threw it with all her might. The fork flew straight and true with amazing velocity. Bert saw it coming, but couldn't move. It struck him prongs forward, just above the left eyebrow. He screamed in pain as the tines broke both skin and bone, wedging itself securely into the front of his skull.

There was only a small amount of blood and Rena threw Bert a look of contempt as she poured herself a drink from a bottle on the sideboard. She drank it down and said, "Guess you better find a doctor Bert, and have that fork taken out of your head."

Bert, shaking with fear, said nothing. He could have lost an eye because of that crazy woman. As it was his sight could be impaired. He walked to the bathroom and studied his head. Very little blood, but his head ached terribly. He touched the fork lightly, and groaned with the increased pain. Without a word he walked out of the house, the fork still in his head, hailed a cab and went to the emergency room at Catholic Hospital.

While he waited for the doctors Bert plotted his revenge against Rena. "She is gonna be out on her ass, out on her ass." he mumbled over and over.

SEVEN

Glen Ellyn College nestled into green, shrubbed hills a scant twenty miles or so from Chicago, but the atmosphere in and around the school was almost rural. The college was small, less than eight hundred students, but in its own way it was remarkably well organized, with comparatively high standards of scholarship. To Jimmy Lee's chagrin, he found that he had to put in several hours of study a day to keep his grades up.

In spite of the increased home work, Jimmy Lee was content. He had a real feeling of mental growth, of filling a void. He knew he had come a long way intellectually since his care-free days at Mint Hill. In a way his mental growth had deepened his religious conviction. He was a sinner—they were all sinners—but with God's help he

would hew to the straight and narrow, and be able to help others too.

The war in Europe and ominous hints of possible war for the United States was frequently reported in the newspapers and on the radio. Germany had signed a military and political alliance with Italy and a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union. The treaty with Russia had baffled everyone at school until Germany and then Russia had invaded Poland.

Jimmy Lee was sitting in the cafeteria when the report came that the Nazi armies were rolling across Poland. "This means we will get into it," Jimmy Lee said. "We can't let them down."

A tall, sandy-haired fellow from Nebraska shook his head. "We've got to stay out of this one. It's a European war; let them fight it."

"Ambrose," a beautiful, softly-modulated, contralto voice spoke from behind Jimmy Lee. The Nebraskan looked up over Jimmy Lee's head. "Why hello, Rachel."

"Ambrose, I beg to differ with you. I agree with this gentleman here."

Jimmy Lee got up to greet the young woman who had endorsed his viewpoint. He smiled foolishly at her and after a pause groped around for a seat for her and said, "Please sit down."

As introductions were made all around Ambrose chuckled aloud. "Jimmy Lee, what's the matter with you? Haven't you seen a pretty girl before?"

Jimmy Lee pensively studied the newcomer for a moment, then said, "That's right, I never have seen anyone before who looked just right, like that."

Laughter greeted his observation, but the young woman retained a serious, almost serene, manner. "I take

it," she said quietly, "that you are completely sincere?"

"Oh, yes." Jimmy Lee flushed as he spoke. "I meant every word of it."

"Thank you," she said. "I'm much obliged."

Later, when the circle of students broke up, Jimmy Lee turned to Rachel. "May I walk you to your dorm?"

They walked much of the way in silence. Rachel Booker was, in fact, a quiet, introspective person. She wore her long, dark hair parted in the middle and tied in a large bun behind, giving her an almost Spanish look with a flawless, well-cut profile, small head, and long, graceful neck. She was unlike any girl Jimmy Lee had ever seen, and he was smitten with her on sight.

Rachel Booker had been raised in Texas right near the Mexican border, so the blood of the hidalgos might well have been in her veins. Tall, slender, and athletic, she was an excellent horsewoman and a good cook. At various times in her childhood she had lived on or near Indian reservations because of her father's missionary work with the tribes of the southwest.

A serious, hard-working, young woman, Rachel had a special sense of humor and enjoyed a well-told joke, though she was not frivolous in any way.

Although she was beautiful Jimmy Lee found that he wasn't thinking about Rachel in a physical sense. He knew that if he was ever to win her, he would have to melt her icy reserve; but he harbored no salacious thoughts about her. It was strange, too, because it had been months since he had been even half satisfied with Winny.

Rachel was a grand girl and he knew that she was really too good for him. He was sure there was not the slightest bit of deceit about her. All the cliches—four square, one hundred percent, a thoroughbred—applied to her, and

she was stunning to look at, too.

"I think," he said to himself as he contemplated his life, "I think I am going to have to wait a long, long time, but she is the one, the one I must marry, the one I shall marry."

Intuitively, Rachel interpreted Jimmy Lee's vibrations. She sensed he had made a decision concerning her and she did not know what to do about it at the moment. Superficially, she knew that she liked Jimmy Lee, and thought he had a stalwart appearance, but she hadn't known him long enough to really know what kind of person he was so she strove to keep him at a distance while she examined her own feelings about this strange, but strangely attractive, young man.

Rachel had had very little moral conflict in her nineteen years and her family, and everyone who knew her, was convinced that her head, as they said, "was squarely on her shoulders." In many ways she was unlike a minister's daughter because she was neither rebellious nor excessively pious.

So well known was her virtue in Socorro, Texas that her schoolmates called her "the nun." This nickname in no way indicated that she was held in ridicule by her peers. On the contrary, she was widely respected and held in awe by her fellow students. She was a fierce competitor in sports and studies, but when it came to boys, she would dance with them, but there was never any necking or petting. If a kiss was ever bestowed or accepted, it was always on the cheek or the brow. She remained unmoved until she met Jimmy Lee.

Rena and Bert were sitting alone in Fuddy's Cafe, the juke box playing a soft version of "Mood Indigo."

"Honey," said Bert, nuzzling his face to Rena's ear. "I hate to go an' I never thought they'd take me."

Rena took a sip of her bourbon and coke and nodded disconsolately. "Just the breaks, baby, just the breaks. We don't have 'em."

"I mean," Bert said with intensity, "I mean, I got an ulcer: I've had one for years. They can't find it. Hell, I had TB when I was a kid, but . . ."

"But now you're 1-A, and soon to be a-way."

They both were silent for a moment. Then Bert said, "Honey, you know the way it looks this damned war may last ten, twenty years."

"Uh-huh."

"I mean," Bert continued, "we have fought like cats and dogs, but we always got back together."

Rena kissed Bert on the cheek. "Bert, baby, you've been my old man, been good to me, good to my baby. It isn't gonna be easy. It's gonna be hell, baby."

"I talked to Lorin Jackson," Bert took Rena's hands in his own, "and he said that through his brother-in-law, who is a master sergeant, he could get me in a unit where I could play in an orchestra."

"He said that?" Rena looked at him quizzically. "How much is it going to cost?"

"Old Lorin says he can do it for a hundred bucks. That's all."

Without hesitating Rena said, "We'll give it to him right away. If he can do it, it's worth a thousand."

Bert laughed. "That's what I thought. Let's have another drink."

Three weeks later Bert White was inducted into the United States Army. One week after that he was sent to an infantry replacement depot in Mississippi where he

started basic training. He wrote Rena that his first sergeant had told him to start playing the harmonica because a clarinet was too big for a soldier to carry around. Bert indicated to Rena that he was seriously considering going AWOL, but thought the better of it when he learned the fate of runaway soldiers. "Either way, they got you," he wrote her, "so I'm going to make the best of it somehow, some way."

Rena didn't look well and didn't feel well so she consulted a doctor. He was a courtly old man, a West Indian with a clipped island accent. Rena couldn't get used to the King's English coming out of the handsome black man's lips. "Look here, now," he said, "you're acting like a fool donchaknow. Not eating and living on bourbon and coke. It's rot, pure rot. You're anemic, blood is thin and, unless I'm mistaken, your liver is on the fritz."

Rena and Bert had put aside a fair amount of money, so it wasn't absolutely necessary that she work all the time. The doctor urged her to stop staying up all night at the cafe, to stop singing for a while, and to rest. "Otherwise," he had said, "little Damon may lose his momma."

Rena could be casual about what might happen to herself, but she was not going to make Damon an orphan. That little boy was too bright and had too much promise for her to play fast and loose with his future. Smart as a whip he was, the king of the kindergarten and the brat of the neighborhood, and she loved him more than anything in the world.

Rena stayed home for a couple of weeks, followed doctor's orders, picked up some weight and lost some of the darkness under her eyes. Ever since she took time off from work she had turned the idea over in her mind. It

had been almost five years since she had left Mint Hill. Did she dare go back and see her father with little Damon? The child bore such a striking resemblance to the Hawkes' family it would be asking for trouble. If the old man ever suspected that she had run away to have a bastard, given to her by his favorite white, it would just about kill him.

In the end Rena took little Damon on the bus and headed for Georgia. She was twenty-one years of age and married to Private Bert White, who was recorded as the natural parent of Damon White. She drank too much, smoked too much, and some times used bad language, but all things being equal she had done fairly well. She had a following in New Orleans and was regarded as a singer with a future. Of course, the one thing Damon would ask her about would be church. She hadn't been inside of one since she left Mint Hill. A little white lie wouldn't hurt Damon as much as the truth would. She'd tell him she married Bert in a church. That would make him feel good.

She stepped off the bus and turned to take Damon's hand. She squinted over the heads of the milling crowd searching for her father, and suddenly he was standing before her, his great arms enveloping his daughter and grandson. There were tears in his eyes. "I'm so happy," Damon said, looking Rena up and down with admiration. "You're dressed like a real lady, a person of quality." He kissed her, turned, and hoisted little Damon up in his arms.

"You know who I am, little feller?"

"You're m'grand daddy, Big Damon. I'm Little Damon."

"God, but he's a smart one," said Damon to the world

at large. "Let's get your bags and head for Mint Hill."

Rena pointed out her one large bag and asked, "You got the Hawkes' car?"

Damon picked up the bag with his free hand. "No, got my own now. No more mules. Got a civilian jeep and it's plush. You'll see."

The cabin was just as she remembered it, only a little smaller than she thought it would be. It was still spotlessly clean, but the earth and the smell of fresh cut grass was sweet to her nose. "It's been a long time, daddy," she said.

"Too long, too long," he added slowly. "But you did write pretty regular. I got to say that for you. Lots of these kids leave their folks and they never hear from them unless they write asking for money. You never asked for a dollar, though you know you could have anything I've got."

Rena smiled at Damon, lifted his hand and kissed it. "I know that daddy. I know that."

Rena stayed in the cabin a week before she ventured up to the Hawkes' house to see Mona. She went alone because she didn't want Sarah Hawkes' eagle eyes examining little Damon. If there ever was anyone who would spot the Hawkes' blood in her child it would be Sarah. Even her own father had said nothing about Damon's caucasian hair. His only comment had been, "Guess Bert White is one of those light-skinned negroes, hey?"

She had nodded and they immediately discussed Bert's letters to her about his experiences in the military. Damon had laughed uproariously when he had learned that Bert had wanted to play in an army band.

"That's the army for you," he said with a laugh. "They'll make a cook or a truck driver out of him, or maybe if he's lucky he'll get in the quartermaster. But if I know the army, he won't get to blow his horn until the emergency is over."

"Don't say that, daddy. That clarinet means everything to Bert."

She had tea with Mona in the Hawkes' kitchen and promised to bring little Damon with her on her next visit. "What day does the missus go to town?" Rena asked.

"Fridays mostly, but that shouldn't bother you none. She was always right partial to you. Anyone connected with the preacher has to be all right with her."

"You're forgetting my momma," Rena said with a twinkle.

Mona looked put out because Rena had brought up a forbidden subject. "Well, yes, that's different. You know what I mean."

"I know, so I'll bring him up here on Friday."

"And I'll bake a pecan pie."

The following Friday Rena walked into Mona's kitchen carrying little Damon in her arms. Mona bustled about, humming to herself as she prepared a large glass of milk and a large portion of pecan pie. She turned to Damon and said, "You know your momma used to eat this pecan pie, but she always wanted lots of whipped cream on it."

"Me too, me too, I'm just like momma!" He watched with eagerness as Mona scooped out large dollops of whipped cream and snapped it on top of the pie.

Lifting little Damon up in her arms she swung him into a chair, giving him a big kiss on the mouth as she did so. She poured tea for Rena and herself without saying a word. Her brows were knit over her steel rimmed glasses

as if she were lost in thought.

"What's the matter, Mona?" Rena asked.

"Hush a moment child, I'm thinkin'."

Rena drank her tea in silence.

Mona broke the silence. "Okay, Rena, I got it all worked out. I think it's best you head back for New Orleans, or there's bound to be trouble. Would have thought there'd a been trouble before this. Damon's eyes must be goin' on him."

Rena knew immediately what Mona meant, but said, "Why? What do you mean?"

"Don't give me none of that stuff," Mona said harshly. "That little fellow is kin to all the white folk in this house. Looks like every one of them, just a sort of caramel version, that's all. No wonder you wanted to come up here when the Missus was out. But that ain't enough. Anyone, any of the folks on the property, black or white, they'd spot it. You got to hit the road, honey."

Suddenly Rena was agitated. Most of all she didn't want to hurt Damon and her gamble that he wouldn't guess her secret now appeared to be extremely dangerous. She sipped her tea and said. "I really, truly didn't think it was *that* obvious."

Mona looked reflective. "So that's why you went away."

Rena held out her hand to little Damon. "Come on, lover, we got to go back and pack." To Mona she said, "Yes, it was hard, but in a way it's turned out all right. Got a nice husband, but he's in the army."

Mona was weeping softly. "I'm sorry, honey, but I had to tell you." Rena took the old lady in her arms, kissed and comforted her. "Now, now, Mona, it's a good thing you told me, otherwise I would have made some trouble."

Mona's face wore a look of perplexity. "That Jimmy Lee," she said quietly. "He sure did fool everyone around here. Never thought he had the good sense to catch you off." She snickered to herself and waved Rena and little Damon out of her kitchen.

Rachel and Jimmy Lee had reached an agreement. They were engaged and the engagement would last one year, until they both graduated. Within that time, either one of the parties could change his or her mind without any recriminations. When they had kissed in agreement, softly and purely, Jimmy Lee said, "Good Lord, I'm glad that isn't written down. It sounds so legal."

Rachel smiled and looked deep into his eyes. "You're a lucky boy, Jimmy Lee, I've given you your out."

Jimmy Lee smiled broadly. "That works two ways. You have your out, too."

Rachel had set the date to allow herself time to be sure about Jimmy Lee. She didn't know if she loved him. She was very fond of him, but she knew it would be all but impossible for her to be swept off her feet by any man.

Rachel wanted children of her own and she had hoped to marry a good man like her father, a man of the cloth or a doctor, someone who would serve mankind. In a way Rachel was almost sure she had found the man she wanted in Jimmy Lee. She knew she was quicker off the mark intellectually than he, but he had tremendous energy and great sincerity and he believed in himself. That meant a lot to her. She was, in fact, first attracted to Jimmy Lee when he led a prayer meeting in the college auditorium.

For fully an hour and a half Jimmy Lee had held his college audience in his hand. It had been a masterful

performance, and Rachel decided that this country boy had a unique and forceful way of praying to God, of talking to his Maker. And she liked it.

Rachel, Jimmy Lee and several other students were putting up Christmas decorations in the auditorium when they heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The entire group was stunned; an all-pervasive gloom settled over them. Jimmy Lee took charge. "Let us pray," he said and he moved to his knees.

Later, when Rachel and Jimmy Lee walked away from the auditorium, she said, "I wonder if this will change anything for us."

"I hope and pray not," said Jimmy Lee.

"What I mean is you probably will want to go into the Chaplain's Corps, like your friend Adam."

Rachel was the chairman of the local chapter of the Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies. "If you go in, I'll become a Red Cross Lady, or a WAC, or something."

Jimmy Lee had ably concealed his lack of enthusiasm for the career of a military chaplain. What he had in mind was a job as a prison chaplain in an institution where the inmates were well secured. As an ordained minister and a student in a religious college he had a deferment and probably would not be called, but if the United States now declared war they would need a lot of young ministers, just like him. The thought did not make him happy.

A week later word came from Mint Hill that Adam Fraser, a captain by then, had been killed when the Japanese bombed Manila. If he didn't try to enlist in the Chaplain's Corps now, he knew that Rachel would walk out on him. At first he was going to try to defer his

enlistment until graduation. In an abstract way he tried that idea on Rachel, but she would have none of it.

"No, Jimmy Lee, I think you are right," she said soberly. "You have to take Adam's place to comfort those who must fight."

"I guess you're right," Jimmy Lee said, but inwardly he was thinking just how he could delay his entry in the army.

As it happened the local Selective Service office had Jimmy Lee write to Washington, and it wasn't until mid-March that he was sent to an army doctor for a physical. The examination was short, and for Jimmy Lee, sweet. When the major in the Medical Corps discovered Jimmy Lee's flat feet and chronic ear infections he immediately rejected him for service.

It was one of the happiest moments in Jimmy Lee's life.

EIGHT

Rena was re-reading one of the rare letters she received from Bert. From everything he wrote the war was just one big pleasure palace to him in Britain. His competence as a musician had made all the difference. He had been assigned to a transportation depot being assembled at Croydon, until he met a black staff sergeant who'd known him in New Orleans. In two days he had been transferred to a Detached Enlisted Men's List at the Sidcomb Headquarters Company.

"All of which means," wrote Bert, "that I now play gigs for American and British officers' dances, and make money on the side playing for civilians a couple of times a week. Man, the living is easy."

Knowing Bert as she did, he was making out pretty

good with those blue-eyed, blond-haired British girls, too. She had heard that in much of northern Europe the Nordic types were fascinated by black men.

She didn't blame him. Hell, being a soldier under any conditions was no picnic for a free spirit like Bert. He was the kind of stud that just had to have a woman every night if possible: otherwise, he wound up drunk or in a fight. Something had to fill the gap. "So," she said to herself, "that old licorice stick is seeing a lot of action. No point in mourning."

Bert's letter telling of the joys of Britain and his long silences had helped to make up her mind. Bert was always telling her she wasn't realistic. Well, now she would be realistic. She would take a lover, or if it suited her, play the field. After all, she reasoned, I've had only two men in my life, and up till now I've been faithful to my husband. Somehow or other old Damon's ideas had got under her skin. Still, at night, it was pretty lonely hugging only an idea.

Rena figured that there was no use rushing into something with the first attractive buck who came along. She had passed up propositions from some really superior men out of loyalty to Bert. They were men who could have given Bert a run for his money in looks and charm. Educated, too. There was a doctor, an accountant and even a manly beauty parlor operator. No use looking back, as Satchel Paige used to say, "they may be gaining on you."

Bert hadn't made an allotment to her out of his military pay and she didn't begrudge him that. There was still several thousand dollars in the savings bank which she could draw on. She had been living quietly with little Damon and could have gone on that way for a couple of

years without working. On thinking it over she knew it would be wiser to get a job singing, make a little money, and guard her nest egg. A week later she was back at the "Five Spot Cafe," singing her old standards, and there were a number of hound dogs, both black and white, "sniffin' aroun'" as Fuddy put it, to see if there might be some action.

This time there was going to be some mighty fine action.

It was settled. Rachel and Jimmy Lee announced their wedding plans. They would be joined in the bonds of holy matrimony in late June, at Mint Hill, just a week after they both graduated from Glen Ellyn. Following a brief, working honeymoon the young couple would head south to northwest Florida, to a small Baptist church in Okaloosa County, in the town of Fort Walton.

When Sarah Hawkes heard that Jimmy Lee had picked himself a wife she wasted little time. A week to the day after she had received Jimmy Lee's letter she arrived—unannounced—at Glen Ellyn College. With her, looking extremely uncomfortable in his city clothes, was a much-harassed Angus Hawkes. When mother and future daughter-in-law finally met it was Sarah Hawkes whose eyes broke first. She liked what she saw, and she knew her son had gotten what he needed: a strong woman. The engaged couple would stay at the Hawkes' house for a few days before the wedding, and then, as Sarah said with tears in her eyes, "You're on your own, and you can fly the coop."

Jimmy Lee took his mother around the waist and kissed her lovingly on the brow. "Now, mother," he said, "you know you'll never be far away from me in my

thoughts, in my prayers, in everything I do that is God's work."

Angus Hawkes was feeling hot and miserable. He wanted to take his jacket and tie off. He wasn't opposed to all this lovey-dovey stuff and he was glad that Jimmy Lee had found himself a right good-looking and smart wife, but he wanted to get back to Mint Hill. It was in this slightly irascible mood that the Hawkes' took leave of the engaged couple.

"Satisfied, are you, now Sarah?"

"She's a smart one, that's for sure. She'll be a credit to him. She's smarter than he is, by a long shot."

Now Angus' shoes were beginning to bind him. He groaned and said, "God help him."

Sarah, who was aware of her own cleverness and her spouse's dimness, was quiet for a moment, and then said crossly, "What do you mean by that? Speak up."

Taciturn as ever Angus said, "I mean my feet hurt me. Now let's get home."

Bert White was taking his leisure, spread out in bed, enjoying a post-coital glow. "Damn, Janie, but you British are funny." He held up a leather-bound book and said, "Listen to this, 'I dote to folly on her schoolgirl moustache.' What a hell of a thing to say about the poor girl."

A trim British WREN, dressed in uniform, walked into the room. "Get up and get dressed, you black ape. I have to be off and you do too."

Bert didn't move, but waved the book.

The girl smiled, "Oh, that's Ronald Firbank, one of our dotty homosexual poets. No one takes him seriously."

"But they published his book."

"Doesn't mean a thing," she said firmly. "Now really, we must be off. I shan't ask you back if you act like a stick."

Bert hopped out of bed, balls naked. He imitated her in a broad version of a British accent, "I shawn't esk you beck, if you act loike a stick."

The WREN chuckled and went out the door. "I'll be waiting for you in the car."

Bert hummed to himself as he put on his splendidly cut uniform, tailor-made for him just off Saville Row. That Janie, with her blond hair, flawless skin, and China blue eyes, was really the living end. The daughter of a lord of the realm, too. Lady Jane Campbell. Hot damn, he wouldn't have believed it if he heard about it from someone else, but if there was a war on, this was the place to be! For just half a moment he allowed himself to think about Rena and the kid: then he blocked them out fast.

Rena had not heard from Bert in almost six months, and in spite of herself was beginning to worry about him. Along with her concern came rage, because she knew from his earlier, rare, missives that he was, as he described it, "living it up."

Since she had decided to be "realistic" and seek out a lover she had had two flings with two different men, one white and one black. Bubba Williams, the old piano player and Bert's buddy, knew immediately when she came back to work that she was looking around.

"I can't blame you none," he said, "I know Bert ain't goin' to no prayer meetin's, where he's at, but he thinks of you as his wife. If he came back he'd stick a knife in you if he found out."

Rena's eyes blazed. "That sonofabitch hasn't written me one line in six months, and it isn't because he's sick. I had to find out he's all right through the Red Cross, that's the kind of bastard your buddy is."

Bubba's plump face wrinkled up in sympathy. "Hell, Rena, I know you're right. Don't misunderstand me. Jes' be careful who you play with. This war can't last forever. Uh, oh, there's our cue. Back on the stand."

Rena got up on the bandstand and swung into "A Man Is A Two Face," the lyrics of which had double meaning for her—". . . a worrisome thing that leads you to sing the blues." The white spotlight picked up her face and torso as she moved in time to the music. She was ripe with maturity, round and voluptuous, yet slim-waisted, lithe, and supple. Her voice was still small, but it was throaty and her phrasing couldn't be improved. She finished her set to an ovation every time and she knew they were applauding the girl, not the voice.

One night she climbed off the stand and Bubba drew her aside and said Roy (he was the owner) "wants you to do him a favor."

Immediately her guard went up. She didn't like Roy. "What does the man want?"

Bubba winked. "Wants you to sit with an important man. White. A Texan."

Rena shook her head. "Don't think I could take a loud mouth Texan 'specially if he's drunk."

Bubba laughed. "He doesn't look like one of those kind, no cowboy hat, no boots. Looks almost sober, too."

"Okay, Bubba, lead him over."

"What do you mean lead him over."

Rena looked up at Bubba with a steady gaze. "I mean I ain't about to walk over and sit down at this Texan's

table. He can join us at our table. You tell him that."

Bubba looked disturbed. "Roy ain't gonna like that. The guy's a big spender."

"That's the way it's gotta be."

She watched Bubba's squat figure move through the crowded tables, stopping now and then to respond to greetings, then continuing his broken field running to the boss's table. He stood chatting for a couple of minutes until a tall, slim white man stood up and began following him. She watched with some amusement as the white man was pushed and jostled in the crowd. She averted her gaze and turned to another part of the room as they approached.

Bubba cleared his throat. "Rena, this is Sandy Bateman. He wants us to have a drink with him."

Rena looked up and saw a boyish-faced man she guessed to be about forty. He stuck out a big, clumsy hand and Rena put out hers.

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Bateman. Sit down and join us."

"What are you drinkin', Mrs. White?"

Rena shot Bubba a look.

Bubba made one of his faces and threw up his hands. "I swear I didn't tell him."

The white man held up one hand. "Wait a minute. Please. Old Bubba didn't say a word. I asked Roy about you and he gave me a fill-in."

"Why?" Rena fixed her big brown eyes on Bateman and waited for him to wilt.

"Why?" he repeated. He looked reflective for a moment and then said, "I guess because I haven't seen any one exactly like you. Oh, I've seen lots of pretty girls before but you have . . ."

"A special something," Rena added.

"That's right. No, you know it, too. Everyone that comes here gets the feeling. You are a damned good singer, too."

"Okay, you made your point," Rena said with a laugh. "Now let's have that drink and talk about something else."

"What'll it be?"

"Bourbon and coke for me. Seagrams and seven for Bubba."

Bubba got up and said, "None for me thanks. Got to go. You won't have to sing this last set, courtesy of Roy and," he looked at Sandy Bateman, "this gentleman."

"Whooeeee," Rena sang, "you must have plenty of weight to get Roy to agree to that."

"Come on," Sandy said, "try a little champagne. I can't finish the bottle myself. Then we'll go on to some late places I know."

Rena had had champagne before but not like this. "Say," she said, "I'll have more of that Mumm's, that is goooood."

Rena awoke slowly the next morning. She had never felt this bad in her life. At first she thought she was home in her own bed, but when she saw the ceiling and her eyes traced the dimensions of the room she knew she was in trouble. She looked quickly around her in the bed. Whomever she had been with had fled the scene. She pulled the sheet up around her and reached for the telephone. Rena gave the operator her phone number and breathed a sigh of relief when Mrs. Edwards answered the phone. It took only a moment to determine that Damon had gone off to school on time and that all

was well. "I'll be home shortly," she said and hung up just as Sandy Bateman walked into the room.

"You sure know how to take advantage of a girl," Rena said, a truculent edge to her voice.

"Now, wait a minute," Bateman protested. "You got sick, after the oysters. Don't you remember that?"

Rena puzzled a moment through the debris, smoke, and alcohol of the night before. "Mmmmm-mmm, I don't like blacking out. We went to eat and . . . and after that it's all a blank."

"A good thing," said Bateman with a laugh. "God, you were one miserable girl. You tossed your cookies for an hour."

"I'm sorry I said what I did. Did you look after me?" She pointed around the room.

"Like a mother hen, and except for undressing you and washing you in the tub, you are untouched."

"You're a good fellow. Lots of men would have just let me be."

"Think nothing of it. I . . . I know this sounds like a snow job, but I think you're something special."

"You got a crush on this here black gal?"

"That I have." Bateman sat on the edge of the bed and grabbed one of her feet under the sheet and squeezed it.

"Well, if you wait until I rinse my mouth out, I'll give you a kiss."

"Don't bother," said Bateman and crushed her to him.

They didn't sleep together that morning. He had business in Baton Rouge and then had to fly to Dallas. He told her about his business: oil. He was invested in several fields, and leased drilling rigs. He had been out in the Middle East surveying a number of Arab countries.

He talked about his business over the breakfast they

had served up in his suite. "Everyone thinks I'm a Texan, but I was born in Montana. I don't have any of the southern or southwestern prejudices."

Rena smiled. "I hear that kind of talk from guys who are Grand Wizards in the Ku Klux Klan."

Bateman laughed. "In your case it would be hard to believe any white man, I grant you that."

Somehow or other Rena thought Sandy Bateman was sincere. He handled her just right, letting her take her time about when and if she was going to sleep with him. He wasn't buying her and he let her know that. Then he proceeded to do just that.

They left the suite separately. Bateman explained, "This is the only concession to the old Irishman who runs this place. He's a good guy, and has been decent to me, but you're well known and so am I to the help."

Rena couldn't help but be a little bit annoyed, but she realized that this was no time to argue.

Sandy had rented a comfortable, expensive but unpretentious apartment near Beauregard Square. For the first few months of their liaison Rena kept her little place, the one she had first rented with Bert. At the end of six months, however, she relented and moved Damon and Mrs. Edwards into the Beauregard Square apartment.

The move involved some major strategy on the part of Rena and Mrs. Edwards to keep the child from knowing of the close relationship his mother now enjoyed with a white man. In a sense, the Beauregard Square apartment was two flats in one. It even had separate entrances from the street, and from different streets at that.

In bed the first night, in the afterglow of a thoroughly-satisfying sexual experience, Rena said, "Come on now,

Sandy, 'fess up to mother. How did you find this set up? You must have spent some time sleeping with other men's wives and crossing racial barriers. This is just too good."

"It took some planning," he said with a smile. "But I had the right incentives. I knew I'd have to get something nice for you, Damon, and Mrs. Edwards."

"You got me set up just like those old Creole ladies."

"That wasn't the intention, but I would like you to give up singing at the club."

And she did.

Graduation at Glen Ellyn was a tearful, yet joyful affair. Although he was not the recipient of any scholastic honors, Jimmy Lee was selected to deliver the invocation and compose a tribute to those fellow classmates who would enter the service, or missionary or Red Cross work abroad.

Everyone from Jimmy Lee's family was on hand save for his brother Rafe, who stayed home to mind the farm. Both Angus and Sarah Hawkes beamed with pride when they heard the applause which greeted their son's invocation. They were proud too, of their future daughter-in-law when she was awarded medals for excellence in English and History.

All of the neighbors in Mint Hill as well were impressed with Rachel Booker. Rafe smiled and kissed his sister-in-law to be and said, "I didn't think Jimmy Lee would be lucky enough to get such a pretty wife."

Mona showed her approval of Miss Rachel, as she called her, by showing her how to bake pecan pie and revealing many of her secret recipes to the bride-to-be.

The wedding took place at the Pineville Baptist Church

because so many guests were invited they couldn't have been accommodated at the Mint Hill church. Everyone said that the bride and groom were a striking couple, "as if touched by God," the minister had said.

To Jimmy Lee's surprise his mother had insisted that Rachel wear her grandmother's lace wedding dress, an antebellum gown favored by flowers of the Old South during the Confederacy. The dress emphasized Rachel's dark beauty, and the purity of her character seemed to shine even more brightly than usual. Jimmy Lee was a lucky man; everyone in Mint Hill agreed.

One of the wedding gifts from Angus Hawkes to his eldest son was a 1942 Ford sedan. It was decorously black as befitted a young preacher and Jimmy Lee and Rachel were totally flabbergasted by the gift. "We probably will have it for the next twenty years," Jimmy Lee said to his father. "You know the way the Model T's are still working."

Rachel wanted to drive to Chicago with the new car for one more visit before they headed south to the new preaching assignment in Florida. They would stay in a hotel and then drive out for a final goodbye to their favorite faculty members.

In Chicago, Jimmy Lee and Rachel visited the Baptist Federation offices, and arranged to meet with some friends of Rachel's father who were staying at that grand place, the Drake Hotel. Seth Larrabee and his wife Laura were good religious people who got rich by selling lettuce and grapes in California. They had been generous to Dr. Booker when he had asked them for help for the needy, but they did not flinch from spending a certain amount of money on themselves. Hence, the suite at the Drake.

The Larrabees had promised to treat Rachel and Jimmy

Lee to the best fish dinner in town and so both young people were looking forward to the visit with added expectations. When they entered the plush hotel and walked into the thickly carpeted lobby, Jimmy Lee was impressed. "It must cost a small fortune to stay here," he whispered.

They called up their hosts and were told to come up. Walking through the lobby to the elevators, Jimmy Lee stepped aside to allow Rachel to enter a car when he heard his name. It wasn't his wife speaking. He hadn't yet stepped into the elevator but he knew that voice. He looked in and saw Rena standing in one corner of the elevator, his wife in another. And there, with Rena, was a child. A boy of about seven.

His eyes took everything in, in a second, in a flash. He was even able to recognize his own features on the little boy immediately; to note the Caucasian texture to his hair—an obvious hybrid, although a beautiful child. He felt his wife's eyes on him; steady, analytical, but without hostility, without suspicion, thank God.

His acting ability came into play. "Why, Good Lord, look who it is. And how well you look. And what's the little boy's name?"

"So good to see you, Jimmy Lee," Rena said warmly. She was glad to see him. Happy to have him see her dressed in such expensive quiet good taste. Her custom-tailored Chanel suit, and the one hundred dollar small toque hat that went just right. She smiled inwardly to herself. She was a pretty fancy "nigger in a woodpile" for Jimmy Lee.

They all stepped out at the tenth floor while Jimmy Lee went through elaborate introductions. Rena asked for Jimmy Lee's family and he, in turn, brought up Damon.

"Your father came to our wedding, just last week. He said you were in New Orleans."

"Yes," she said brightly, "New Orleans is home, but we come up to see some of my husband's relatives now and then." Little Damon was about to ask who the relatives were, but the pressure of his mother's hand silenced him.

When Rena told Jimmy Lee that her husband had been abroad as a soldier for more than a year, Rachel broke in and said, "You poor dear."

"Well, he's pretty lucky. He's posted in London and seems to like it."

"But it's hard on you and your son," Rachel said.

Rena nodded. "I'm sorry," she said extending her hand to Rachel, "we must go." She looked up squarely into Jimmy Lee's eyes. "I'm glad you got what you wanted, Jimmy Lee. I never figured you for a preacher, but I'm sure you'll be a wonderful one." She looked down at little Damon. "Say goodby to Mr. and Mrs. Hawkes, now Damon."

Shyly and with great deliberation, little Damon shook hands with Rachel and then turned to Jimmy Lee. He took the gentle little boy's hand in his and for a moment was impelled to lift the child up in his arms and hug him. But the moment passed and after random farewells they walked separate ways down the dimly-lit hallway.

Jimmy Lee put up a good show throughout dinner with the Larrabees, but later when he and Rachel returned to their own shabby hotel he was unusually quiet and introspective.

"Thinking about that girl?" Rachel asked softly.

Jimmy Lee looked up absent-mindedly after a moment and said, "What? Oh, yes, I am. Life is so strange. I never

thought I would ever see her again, particularly under these circumstances."

"She's an unusual woman. Did you know she could sing?"

Jimmy Lee shook his head. "No, never. She was always a pretty little thing, but I never knew she had a voice."

"Those clothes she was wearing cost a fortune." There was not a trace of envy in her voice. "The little boy is handsome too; but he doesn't look at all like his mother."

Jimmy Lee grunted. "Uh-huh, I noticed that. Guess her husband is one of those light-skinned nigras."

"Or a white man."

Jimmy Lee was quiet for a moment. "Yes, you could say that. She's come a long way in the world."

"I wonder," Rachel persisted, "does Damon know how well his daughter is doing?"

"Gee, I don't know, darling. I didn't talk all that much with him. He did say her husband, a musician, was in the army and had been sent overseas."

"I pray she will be all right," Rachel said. "I sense a certain sadness about her. She acted very strange with you, Jim."

"I'm a face from the past," said Jimmy Lee. "Reminded her of her humble origins now that she's rich and successful." He turned the light out, turned over, and was asleep in less than a minute. Rachel kept staring at the ceiling and listening to Jimmy Lee's regular breathing. "Why?" she asked herself. Why was she so unsettled about that chance meeting with that beautiful black woman and her child? What was it that had such a disturbing affect on her?

She would have to think some more on it later. Right

now, she was too tired to decipher the meaning of it all. It was there, she knew. One day she'd decode it all, she knew that, too.

NINE

The evening Jimmy Lee and Rachel drove into Fort Walton there was a furious storm, not quite a hurricane, blowing in from the Gulf of Mexico. The main street, such as it was, was now a mud wallow. Jimmy Lee drove an irregular route around the deep pot holes, which were then small lakes brimming with roiling, muddy water. "Lord," Jimmy Lee exclaimed, "I can't see a foot in front of me."

The pelting rain had obscured vision to a ceiling zero condition. In addition, with the windows rolled up, the heat was intense inside the car. "Why not park for a while?" Rachel suggested.

"No, I think I know just about where I am. I'll just inch along for a bit. The hotel is just up the road and

on the left."

"I think I'll do some praying," Rachel added laconically.

"A good idea," said Jimmy Lee. "I'll join in silently."

Fifteen minutes later, their prayers answered, the storm had blown inland and they were able to find their way to an elegant, old frame mansion which had been converted into a hotel, The Fort Walton Inn.

The hotel, run by two elderly sisters, Miss Jane and Miss Ruth Ashland, was a source of pride to the entire town. The rest of the hotels in this second-rate summer resort were at best tacky and run-down, but the Inn had a new coat of white paint and broad verandahs which ran the entire length of the front of the building. The shrubbing created an illusion of luxury and riches as well, for the front lawn leading down to the rocky beach was filled with stately palms and tall, thick-trunked pine trees, many of which must have been well over one hundred years old.

"In a desert of sand and bad taste," Rachel had said, "the Inn is an oasis of beauty."

Rachel's dismal view of Fort Walton had been formed by the large number of saloons that lined the unpaved main street. Despite the fact that most of the town was off limits to the military personnel based at Eglin Field, a fair number of G. I.'s, and some young officers got into trouble in Fort Walton.

The military air base had been an economic godsend to the area, long an area of real want and privation. In addition to the main base, Eglin Field, about nine miles inland from Fort Walton, there were nine or ten smaller airfields and gunnery ranges in the area between Fort Walton and Pensacola, where the navy had long had both

naval and air bases.

So almost overnight Jimmy Lee and Rachel were made more aware of the war, and in a way became a part of the war. Half of those attending services at the Calvary Baptist Church were servicemen and women, and three weeks after he arrived in Fort Walton, Jimmy Lee was invited to preach at the chapel at Eglin Field.

Shortly after he arrived Jimmy Lee discovered why the air force had selected the deserted wasteland of northwest Florida for an air base. It was the headquarters for the Army Air Forces Proving Ground Command, a center for research and development and a place of much top-secret activity. Though it was ideal because of its isolation, it was extremely difficult, for the enlisted men based there because there was no city of any size nearby to provide suitable diversion.

Jimmy Lee established fairly soon that when men are locked up anywhere for a time away from their usual sources of pleasure, be they wine, women or song, there is bound to be trouble. Early in his visits to the air base he had discussed the problem with the chaplains based there, but those gentlemen just shook their heads and told him that "there was a right way, a wrong way, and an army way."

The problem of drinking and brawling involved not only the enlisted men. One of the favorite couples at the Inn were the Edwards, Wayne, a first lieutenant, a tall, well set-up young man of twenty-three and his lovely wife Maxine, a trifle flashy, but a sweet-natured southern belle withal.

It had happened the first week Jimmy Lee and Rachel were at the Inn. Rachel and Maxine were almost the same age, had similar interests, and spent much time together.

Late one night Jimmy Lee and Rachel were awokened from their sleep by shouts of terror. Fumbling in the dark, Jimmy Lee found the light, then they threw on their robes and rushed down the hall where they found the frightened owners of the hotel and a cluster of other guests. The room, Lieutenant Edwards' room, from which the screams had issued, was then silent.

Jimmy Lee looked around the crowded passageway and realized he would have to take charge. He stepped up to the door and rapped firmly on it. No response.

He knocked again, this time harder, and called out, "Wayne, Wayne. Please answer us. Open the door."

The assembled group held their breaths. What had happened? Murder? Murder and suicide?

The door swung open halfway. The lights were still not on in the room, the light in the hallway was faint, so all had to strain to see who it was. It was Lieutenant Edwards, bleeding profusely from a jagged cut over his left eye. He didn't have a stitch on.

He smiled a little crookedly when he saw Jimmy Lee. He tried to close the door as he said, "Just a little domestic quarrel, Reverend."

Jimmy Lee put his foot in the door. "What about your wife?"

Lieutenant Edwards moved his body behind the door to cover his nakedness. "She's okay, Maxine," he spoke as he turned away, "tell the Reverend you're all right."

Somewhere in the darkness, Maxine cleared her throat. "Yes, I'm all right. Don't bother. I'm sorry to have caused so much trouble."

By the next evening the Edwards' had cleared out. Wayne had moved back to the base and Maxine had taken a bus to Pensacola, and a plane to San Antonio.

"I saw Maxine before she left," Rachel confided to Jimmy Lee. "Her face was badly swollen. He beat her very badly."

Jimmy Lee knit his brows. "That's terrible. He doesn't strike me at all as that kind of fellow. I wonder whether we should report him to his command."

"I wouldn't," Rachel said dryly, shaking her head no.

Jimmy Lee looked surprised. "Surely you don't endorse wife-beating?"

"No."

"Well, then?"

"In one way I think Maxine got off lucky."

"Oh?"

"Yes, Jimmy Lee. You see, she went to bed with his best friend, his co-pilot at the air base."

Maxine had told Rachel the whole thing, through sobs of remorse and self-recrimination. She loved Wayne, she said, but she had had "a thing," she said about Hammy Johnson for a long time. Hammy had been grounded by a cold, and Wayne had had to fly overnight to Dayton.

"They started drinking together in the room," Rachel said, "and the mutual attraction just got too much for them."

"How did Wayne find out?"

"Oh, he found his friend's watch and some other personal things there in the room. He beat the truth out of her."

"That's a terribly sad story," Jimmy Lee said. "A shame. I'll say a prayer for them both. You say she said she loved her husband, but had 'a thing' about the other man?"

"Yes," Rachel said. "She said there was no electricity between herself and Wayne, but that the sparks fairly

flew with her lover, but she knew he was no good. That he would love her and leave her."

Jimmy Lee felt a pang. That was exactly the way it was for him with Rachel. He loved her deeply, completely, but he had failed to awaken her to the frenzied passion he had known with Rena. Seeing Rena, cool, reserved, and beautiful in that Chicago elevator brought back vividly the wildly satisfying sex he had had with his first love.

Rachel called him back to himself. "Jimmy Lee, you're lost in thought. Jimmy Lee, what's wrong?"

Jimmy Lee stroked his jaw reflectively and said, "What do you think can be done to save a marriage like that?"

"I told her," Rachel said, "that she was placing too much emphasis on physical love. She's one of those voluptuous Texas girls who are ready most of the time. A hot tamale."

Jimmy Lee did a double take at his young, and he was convinced, pious, wife. "What do you know about hot tamales?"

"Unfortunately," Rachel said, shaking her head, "I saw plenty of them when I was helping my father."

"So you can't see Maxine turning over a new leaf and going back to her husband?"

Rachel pursed her lips. "I'd say the chances of it ever really working again are doubtful. Also, he is not about to give her another chance."

Jimmy Lee opened a counseling service at his little church for any of the servicemen, or their families who wished to make use of it. Jimmy Lee found that a number of soldiers were frustrated by the chaplain's uniform. It shouldn't have been that way and Jimmy Lee was quick to point out to the soldiers that it was the man inside the

uniform, and his understanding of God, that was important.

There was a wave of excitement at the base and in town when the invasion of France commenced on D-Day, the 6th of June. Another very personal kind of excitement for Jimmy Lee occurred that week when Rachel told him that she was, from all indications, two months pregnant.

Jimmy Lee was delighted, but to himself vowed he had to do something worthwhile for his wife and unborn child. He was becoming a really good preacher now. He knew it and the folks all over northwest Florida knew it. He was in great demand as a guest preacher, but his light was a pinpoint in the darkness. He would strike out further afield, become more active, and work harder than ever.

In the next few months the tide of the war turned for the Allies and victory after victory was reported from both Europe and Asia. Sadly, however, the casualty lists grew in small towns all over America. Jimmy Lee officiated at funeral ceremonies in Fort Walton for a disproportionately large number of dead soldiers, sailors, and airmen.

In mid-March, Rachel had a baby daughter who was christened Sarah, after her grandmother. Rachel proved that she was a strong girl and was up and around and running the house in little more than a week, despite the fears of her doctor that she would have some ill-effects from childbirth.

An old friend of Jimmy Lee's, who had attended the Edgemere Bible College, re-entered his life. Wayne Crandall had also been one of the leaders of the Bascombe High School Young Christian Society. Now, looking trim

and fit, he waited in the back of Jimmy Lee's church.

After the service Jimmy Lee and Rachel took his boyhood chum back home to dinner. There, they reminisced about the old days, talked over mutual friends, and eventually got around to the future.

"Jimmy Lee," Wayne said quietly, "you know I'm a southern regional director for Fight For Christ International."

Jimmy Lee nodded reflectively. What was Wayne coming up with?

"Well," Wayne continued, "now the war's almost over there is going to be a convention of the world membership—delegates from thirty, maybe thirty-five countries all meeting at Hermance in Switzerland. We'd like you both to go to Hermance as delegates."

Jimmy Lee felt a flush of happiness, and then he looked at Rachel, "What about little Sarah?"

Rachel smiled and patted his knee. "She's healthy. We can take her with us. What you should be thinking about is getting a substitute to fill in for you here."

Wayne stood up. "Then it's settled. You'll go?"

Jimmy Lee nodded. "I'll call the federation offices tonight. I think they'll let me take the trip. Many thanks, Wayne, for the opportunity."

For eight days some 528 delegates of The Fight For Christ International gathered in Hermance for a series of meetings and seminars that had Jimmy Lee's head in a swim. The international conclave excited him, broadened his vision, and gave him a feeling of great strength and conviction in his faith.

To his surprise Wayne Crandall had asked Jimmy Lee to speak before a large delegation of Africans. His

subject: How White is Christianity in the Black South? Although he was given a day to prepare his remarks, he was nervous and unsure about his subject, yet his audience was silently respectful. They had the feeling that the young white southerner was trying to explain, in reasonable terms, the turmoil and terror of racism in his own country, without indulging in a diatribe against the white south.

As Jimmy Lee spoke his eyes flicked across the rows and rows of black faces. He was struck by the dignity and character of many of the men and women sitting before him. One in particular, a woman, dressed in white with a batik head dress, was strikingly beautiful. She reminded him of Rena, and immediately, he lost his train of thought. He used an old formula and immediately called for a prayer while he collected his thoughts as best he could.

He knew he would single out the beautiful black woman for a conversation immediately after his talk. Rachel was back at the hotel with Sarah, so he would have ample time to chat with the woman. His hands trembled as he thought about her and then about Rena. How inadequate were his attempts to block out memories of Rena! She was always just under the surface of his consciousness; she haunted him. As he closed his remarks and stepped down from the podium, he moved around to the right so that he could engage the lovely delegate in conversation.

His timing was perfect for the beautiful woman was one of those who crowded around him to chat. Jimmy Lee soon learned the lady hailed from the Senegal and spoke English with a delightful French accent.

Her name was an exotic melange of Senegal and

French, as she was. Daolah Houpheet-Boiney was almost six feet tall in her sandal feet. She was statuesque and imperious; a black queen. Her eyes flashed with quick intelligence as she told Jimmy Lee how impressed she was with his presentation. "You have given us a new dimension to the classic American race problem. Is it because you are a, how does one say it, a redneck?"

Jimmy Lee colored slightly and laughed. "Almost, but not quite. In fact, the real redneck country is in backward areas of Georgia and Mississippi. However, on reflection, we have rednecks in some of our northern cities too. It's more a state of mind than a geographical fact."

Jimmy Lee attempted to divide his attention among the handful of delegates clustered around him, but one by one the men fell away as the Senegalese lady dominated the conversation. Finally, Jimmy Lee and Mademoiselle Houpheet-Boiney walked from the lecture hall together.

Over coffee on the hotel terrace Jimmy Lee heard her story. She wore her clothes well, it developed, because she had been a model at the *haute couture* house of Christian Dior for two years.

"I studied law at the Sorbonne during that time," she said in her soft, well-modulated voice. "Everything was *formidable*. I had a handsome boy who wanted to marry me, a French boy, and then . . ."

"Then?" Jimmy Lee asked.

Daolah's face became solemn, an expressionless mask. "I had to return to the Senegal. My father, he was in the government. There were changes, an upheaval of sorts. The French were no longer in favor. I had to break off with my . . . my Jacques."

She sipped her coffee in silence. Jimmy Lee sat quietly, waiting for her to speak.

"I don't know what's wrong with me," she said. "I'm *un peu distrait*. I feel I know you because you are so *sympatique*, but I find myself running on so."

Jimmy Lee took her finely shaped hand in both of his. "Please, please, go on. It does us all good to talk over our problems. You know that."

Daolah studied him in silence for a moment with her lambent brown eyes. "Yes, you are right. Well, Jacques came to the Senegal, but I was forbidden to see him. My father arranged to have his visa cancelled, but before he had a chance to leave the country his body was taken from the water."

"How did it happen?" Jimmy Lee interrupted.

"They said, the officials said, that he had too much to drink, that he had been drinking palm wine in a brothel and that afterwards he had fallen off a jetty into the sea."

"You don't believe it."

Daolah cast down her eyes. "I know he didn't. He didn't drink wine or anything else."

"And, so?"

"And, so, after many months of grief, of hopeless misery, I turned to Jesus Christ. I'm lonely, unfulfilled in many ways, but I'm trying to make some kind of contribution. I . . . we are trying to save bodies in my country as well as souls. Our religious group is setting up medical clinics in remote parts of the country. I'm very active in paramedical work."

Jimmy Lee murmured, "I so admire you for what you are doing."

Daolah smiled brightly and said, "And I you. Come now, do not allow me to depress you."

"No, not at all. I had a somewhat similar experience when I was much younger." He felt his ears getting red.

"The girl didn't die and is still alive, but taboos kept us apart."

"Would it surprise you to know that I felt that something like that had happened to you?" Daolah leaned back and studied her handsome companion.

"Really, you must have strong intuition. What is it—extrasensory perception."

"Yes," said Daolah. "And I suggest that we both pray for one another, for we both sense one another's weaknesses."

Her comment brought Jimmy Lee up short. He searched out her eyes and saw a knowing, amused look in those magnificent, exotic orbs. Her face smiled matching her eye smile and she said, "You know our spirits have been communicating, don't you?"

Jimmy Lee was visibly unsettled. "You mean in the lecture hall?"

"Of course."

"You knew that I was interested in you while you were sitting in the audience?"

She placed one of her beautifully moulded hands on one of his knobby farm hands. "You are going to say that because I am tall and wear clothes well, that I have always attracted attention wherever I have gone. That is true, but that is not what I meant. Your manner on the platform betrayed no interest in me, but I felt your spirit calling to me, drawing me to you after you had spoken. Come now, admit it. You felt it, too."

Jimmy Lee paused a moment before speaking. "God forgive me, what you say is true. I did feel that we were being irresistibly drawn together, but I thought it was only true of me."

Daolah smiled enigmatically, and shook her head.

"No, my pulse, my heart beat, quickened as we were drawn together." She cast her eyes downward and closed them. "In another time, another place, you and I would have bred wise men and warriors, but such is not our fate."

Daolah stood up suddenly and broke the mood. She smiled. "I must say *adieu*. I wish you success in all you undertake. I shall never forget you."

Jimmy Lee managed to say, "Nor I you," and sat down heavily after she left. He watched as she walked majestically across the terrace, the focus of all eyes. I wonder, he thought, was she pulling my leg? It was almost too good a performance to be true. He had felt vibrations, he had been drawn to her, but that was the satanic power of sex.

Jimmy Lee saw Daolah from afar once or twice more at the conference. She waved at him on one occasion and then turned away. It was obvious that she would no longer seek him out. His meeting with the Senegalese beauty had troubled him deeply because he had begun to think about Rena again. She was on his mind by day and in his dreams by night, and Rachel had even taken note that he seemed preoccupied, weighed down by a problem.

Jimmy Lee did the only thing he ever did when he was troubled: he prayed, and he prayed for Rena, for her salvation, and for his black son.

At the close of the seminar in Hermance, Wayne Crandall suggested that Rachel and Jimmy Lee join him for a day of sightseeing in nearby Geneva. Crandall, who was short, blond, and charged with nervous energy, said, "Jimmy Lee, Rachel, if you've a mind to, we can go back

to the states by way of London. There are some people I have to meet there, whom you should also meet."

Rachel and Jimmy Lee agreed immediately to the side trip to London. When they were alone in their Geneva hotel room, she said: "Darling, I believe Wayne is going to make you an offer."

Jimmy Lee looked quizzically at his wife. "What makes you think so?"

Rachel walked to his side and patted him on the face. "Because, my golden-voiced husband, I told him that the federation was planning to send Commander Andrews back to the Fort Walton church."

"Ah," said Jimmy Lee, "that was astute."

"I thought so," his wife said smugly. "Look, Wayne confided in me that all of the top brass in the International are very pleased with your work. They think you have great promise as a preacher, as an evangelist."

It was what he wanted to do, longed to do—bring the word of the Lord to the masses. And Rachel, knowing his ambition, would do everything she could to help him reach his goal. He knew he was a fortunate, a much blessed man.

Prior to leaving London, Wayne Crandall met with Rachel and Jimmy Lee. The feisty little man appeared extremely happy. "Children," he said expansively, "I have fixed things for you. You are set in our evangelical plan, and you'll work in the southern cities to start with."

Jimmy Lee and Rachel hugged one another so hard that little Sarah started to cry.

During the seminar Jimmy Lee, Wayne, and a number of the American delegates had discussed the future of

evangelism. All agreed that the calling had deteriorated and had lost its reputation as a noble ministry.

Wayne pointed out that since Billy Sunday, there hadn't been a really effective and nationally popular evangelist. "Before the war Aime Semple Macpherson became much too controversial, and although there were some good people preaching, none of them got what you would call really wide recognition. Right now, evangelism is an uphill fight."

Jimmy Lee kept going over his conversations with Wayne. It now seemed to him that Wayne had been sounding him out by indirection rather than speaking straightforwardly of a new career as an evangelist. Some of his family and friends, he knew, would feel that he was taking a step backward to give up a trim wooden church for a folding tent, even a large one.

Rachel and Jimmy Lee had agreed that, at least for a while, she and little Sarah would join him on his evangelical trips. In the interim, Rachel was going to look at available cottages in the Mint Hill area. His roots were in Lanier County and he wanted to be able to see his parents from time to time. What were they doing now, he wondered? How were his sisters and his brother? What of old Damon? And of Rena? Thoughts of Rena merged with thoughts of Daolah and back to Rena.

When the doorchimes rang, Rena was in a dressing gown in her bedroom. She called out to Mrs. Edwards, "Nellie, see who is at the door." She glanced at her watch—two in the afternoon; it must be some door-to-door salesman; she wasn't expecting anyone.

Mrs. Edwards knocked at Rena's door, a look of puzzlement on the old lady's face. "Hit's a sojer," she

said. "Says he's your husband."

Rena's heart felt as though it were going into her mouth. Then she started to get angry. "Did you let him in?"

"No-suh, I did not. I sho enough did not."

"Good. I'll take care of it, Nellie. Thank you."

She walked to the door thinking, "The dirty sonofabitch turns up almost a year after the war is over and I haven't heard a word from him for a good two years."

Rena steeled herself for a moment and then swung the door open.

Bert White looked splendid. A little bit older, but he had taken on a veneer of class. Rena, who had also progressed in that area, recognized the change immediately. Bert almost looked distinguished with his new, well-trimmed moustache. He was all tongue and teeth as he came at her, trying to sweep her into his arms.

She darted away from him expertly. "No you don't, you no-good bastard. No letters, no word, no nothing for over two years and you expect a hug and a kiss."

Bert laughed, put his hands on his hips and said, "Same old Rena. Remember, whatever has happened I'm still your old man."

"In name only. Well, come in and sit down. We might as well get this over." She motioned him to follow her into the apartment.

"Nice little flat you've got here," Bert commented with an upper-crust British accent.

Rena laughed out loud and Bert's face clouded over. "You made it to Beauregard Square, while I was doing all right in Mayfair."

"That a fact?" Rena said noncommittally.

"Yeah, that's fact," he responded. Pointing to his

uniform he added, "And I became an officer too, a chief warrant officer."

Rena smirked at Bert. "You one hell of a successful nigger. Now, tell me boy, what do you want with me?"

Bert bared his teeth in anger. She could always get a rise out of him. "I suppose there's none of my money in the bank account?"

"Every time you wrote for money I sent it to you. You ran out two years ago."

Bert thought about that for a moment. He rubbed his jaw reflectively and said, "Got any scotch in this place? I could stand a drink."

Rena pointed to a well stocked sideboard. "Help yourself, there's ice in that silver bucket."

"Don't use it."

"Very British."

Bert poured himself a substantial drink and walked back to his chair, taking note of the apartment. "Damned right. I think the British are the salt of the earth, most of 'em. By the way, this place doesn't look like it was furnished by a plantation nigger." He ran his hands over the green raw silk upholstery of the chair in which he was sitting.

"Sandy equipped the place for me," Rena said laconically. "But I've made some changes here and there."

"That's your friend, Bateman."

She was not surprised he knew her lover's name. "That's right."

Bert's eyes narrowed. "He knows you're married, right?"

Rena's jaw jutted out. "So?"

"So," he added menacingly, "he's an adulterer."

"You bastard," she hissed. "When the war ended and you didn't come home, didn't write or anything I thought you were dead. I found out through the Red Cross that you had been separated from the service in New York and that you'd gone back to England." Very slowly she said, "I don't owe you anything. I gave you all your money, and more, and I'll divorce you now, as soon as I can."

Bert jumped to his feet and walked toward Rena. "Heli, honey, we both made mistakes. Can't you take a joke? I didn't mean to upset you."

His placatory manner momentarily soothed her. She brushed her long hair off her face with a tired gesture. "All right, Bert, get to the point. What do you want? Money?"

Bert took a swig of his drink before answering. "Rena, I am sorry, but I'm tapped out, and I need a score."

Rena pursed her lips and nodded knowingly. "Look Bert, we had some good days together, but all of that is dead. I'll let you have five hundred now, but I'm not going to make it a regular thing, so don't think you can keep hitting me up."

Bert's face was wreathed in smiles. This had been easier than he thought it would be. Rena got up, walked to another room, and returned with a checkbook in her hand. Quickly she dashed off a check, tore it out of the book and handed it to him.

As she passed the check to Bert, he grabbed her around the waist and drew her to him. "C'mon baby, just one for old time's sake." He pressed his erection into her belly.

She reacted like an enraged tigress and clawed him with her nails—talons really—raking him on the throat and cheeks. He shrieked with pain and stepped back, holding his hands up to his wounds. She stood before

him, shaking with rage, demented with hate, furious, with a will to kill. He knew that condition and he knew he had better get out. He grabbed his hat and, cursing, ran for the door. Either he would kill her or she him.

When he bolted, Rena sank down in a chair and wept.

TEN

Rachel and Jimmy Lee prepared to take leave of Fort Walton with mixed feelings. They had lived in the backwater Florida town for almost three years and had grown enormously fond of many of the people. Little Sarah had been born there, and in a sense, Jimmy Lee's talent for the ministry had been tested for the first time in Fort Walton. Now he knew what a difficult task it was to serve all of the various factions in even a small church.

Jimmy Lee had set his feet on another course, but he had done it with Rachel's full consent. They possessed very little in a material sense. As few hundred dollars in a savings bank, a car and the clothes on their backs. But they were rich in faith, both of them, and he was convinced that because of this they could meet and

conquer any worldly problems.

He had chosen to leave a safe and comfortable religious system, the Baptist Federation, because he felt that he would be better able to serve God as an evangelist working under the banner of the Fight For Christ organization. The Baptist Federation had been prepared to assign him to a church somewhere near his family's home which would have been fine for Jimmy Lee at one time. He would have been happy as a rural minister, but the trip to Europe had opened his eyes, had given him other ambitions.

He had felt the stirrings of those ambitions on the few occasions when he had preached to large crowds in Tallahassee, Jacksonville, and Pensacola. He had experienced a strange sensation of power, of being able to move large masses of people to positive action, to prayer, and to God. That was his destiny, he was sure. The Lord had helped him to forge his gift of speech, and the Lord would help him to perfect it.

For the two weeks following their arrival in Atlanta, Jimmy Lee engaged in daily seminars at the Fight For Christ headquarters, where he was introduced to the man who'd been assigned to work and travel with him in his territory. A tall, rangy fellow, a former insurance executive turned religious administrator, Harold Pink was still in his thirties, but gave the impression of being a score of years older. It wasn't as much his appearance as his manner, which was extremely thoughtful and deliberate.

It was Harold Pink who convinced Rachel that she and little Sarah should not accompany Jimmy Lee in the first few months of his evangelical tour. "He's going to need time," Pink had said. "Lots of time to come to grips with

himself. It isn't going to be a bed of roses."

At first Rachel had protested that she could be a source of strength to Jimmy Lee on his travels, but Harold Pink had rubbed his prognathous jaw reflectively and said, "Miz Hawkes, no matter how you look at it this is a road show. It's a bible road show dedicated to Jesus, but it's still a road show. For the moment, and in the towns we plan to hit, it would be difficult for you and the baby." He then proceeded to tick off the towns and cities which had been selected for Jimmy Lee's indoctrination.

"Let's see," Pink said. "First we go to Valdosta, then to Thomasville, Bainbridge, then to Columbus. We move out of Georgia then to Phoenix City and then we hit five or six other places in Alabama."

"It is a lot of moving around," Rachel observed.

"Uh huh, it is, and we don't rightly know how long we'll stay in each place. There could be hold-overs, extensions, or we could cut the visit short because we aren't getting anywhere, or because of trouble with the local clergy."

"Trouble with the clergy?"

"That's right. It's been known to happen. They are not all sold on evangelists."

Later, Wayne Crandall and Harold Pink outlined the problem to Jimmy Lee and Rachel.

"What it is," said Crandall, smacking his leg with the open palm of his hand, "is that evangelism has fallen into disrepute."

Jimmy Lee recalled Wayne's position on evangelism's bad reputation from their earlier conversations in Hermance and London. "You said in Europe," Jimmy Lee recalled, "that most evangelists estranged the local clergy because of their emphasis on contributions, on

money. Can't we de-emphasize that? Make them understand that we aren't money-hungry."

Harold Pink scratched the back of his head. "Reverend, you have hit on the problem. We don't want to act money hungry, but in actual fact, if we don't get contributions we are in trouble."

"I know," said Jimmy Lee, "that's one of the reasons I want Rachel and Sarah to go back to Mint Hill and stay with my folks. This way, we may be able to keep expenses down."

The following day Jimmy Lee called Sarah and Angus Hawkes and asked if his wife and child could stay with them for a while. "You know better than to ask," was his mother's response. "Your daddy and I will look after them right fine while you're out preaching the gospel."

Rachel had extracted a promise from Jimmy Lee that this first separation would be terminated by a lengthy visit in eight to ten weeks. "Jimmy Lee," she had said, "I have your word. Either you come to me, or Sarah and I will come to you wherever you are."

Two days after Rachel and little Sarah drove off to Mint Hill, Jimmy Lee, Harold Pink, and two volunteers from the Fight For Christ headquarters accompanied him to Valdosta, Georgia for a six day Campaign of Prayer. It was an inauspicious beginning for Jimmy Lee. He spoke well, that was not the problem. He genuinely moved those who came to the prayer meetings, but the turn-outs had been disappointing.

Harold Pink immediately cut the last two days of the Valdosta campaign and made it a four day booking. "No use flogging a dead horse," he said. "The local ministers haven't pushed it."

What Jimmy Lee discovered was that if the local

ministers did not choose to cooperate they could seriously affect the success of a Campaign for Christ. Also, it was clear that whatever advance planning had been done was totally inadequate. "Look," he said to Harold Pink, "maybe I should come in three or four days ahead of time and talk to the local ministers, show them what I look like, let them know that I'm pushing for people to go to their churches, that I'm not against organized ministries, get them behind me."

Pink at first rejected Jimmy Lee's suggestion. "Nope, it won't work. We're too tightly scheduled."

Jimmy Lee shook his head. "If we keep cutting our schedule back and don't have any revenues we're out of business anyway."

It was decided that in both Thomasville and Bainbridge Jimmy Lee would visit the clergy and "turn on the charm." In both instances, the audiences were satisfactorily large. The Fight for Christ campaign didn't establish any records, but they didn't have to cut short more bookings and they managed to realize a little profit after expenses.

From his discussions with Wayne Crandall and Harold Pink, Jimmy Lee had concluded that too many evangelists in the past had charged around accusing the organized churches of sloth, corruption, and ungodliness. "Perhaps Billy Sunday could get away with that sort of thing, but we've got to show these people that we respect them," he told Harold Pink.

Pink smiled. "I do believe that you've got the hang of it. We're going to be all right."

And they were. For the next six weeks, Jimmy Lee and his group visited eight towns in Alabama and Tennessee and while there were no absolute "whangdoodle suc-

cesses," as Harold Pink described them, they made modest amounts of money wherever Jimmy Lee spoke. Also, Jimmy Lee seemed to be able to make friends wherever he went. His straightforward manner, firm handshake, and clean-cut good looks broke down barriers everywhere.

Jimmy Lee's Fight for Christ team reconnoitered in Knoxville for a week while plans were made for a campaign in the western states. As soon as he learned that they would have a week free he telephoned Rachel to come to Knoxville immediately. "I can't wait to see you."

He had missed his wife and baby, but because it had been a time of intense activity, challenge, and tension, the weeks actually seemed to pass swiftly. There were the bad periods when he tossed and turned in bed and was unable to fall off to sleep immediately. It was then that he thought of Rachel, that he needed her most. Frequently he found his thoughts drifting to Rena, wondering where she was and how she was faring. And against his will he would think of how it once was years ago. Of how wonderful it was making love to her.

When Bert White fled Rena's apartment in Beau-regard Square, he had been full of hate and the desire for revenge. That night, crazy with drink and rage, he took his revenge. Without too much trouble he established that Sandy Bateman lived in Dallas with his wife and two children.

When the black servant answered the telephone Bert affected his best British accent. The charade went off as expected and he learned that Mrs. Bateman would not be back for a few hours.

"Very good," he said in his Etonian manner, "would you tell her that Bert White will call later. I'm in New Orleans for a few days. I've got something important to tell her."

Bert went back to the bar and slaked his thirst for scotch for the next three hours, but his eyes were still bright with hatred. "Gonna fix that tramp's wagon," he muttered to himself. "Didn't have a red cent when I met up with her; now she's on Beauregard Square. Gonna fix her wagon."

Beverly Bateman had long been considered one of the leading figures in Dallas society. Although only thirty-one years old, she had served as chairwoman of countless charity balls—mainly because she was Quentin Randolph's daughter. Quent Randolph, one of the richest men in the state, traced his lineage back to the Randolphs of Virginia.

A taffy blonde, Beverly Bateman was tall (five foot nine in stocking feet), coolly beautiful, with a purity of profile that reminded one of idealized portraits of Joan of Arc or Queen Guinevere. She rode well, had attended an eastern finishing school, and had been a debutante. In short, she was the apple of her rich daddy's eye.

Quent Randolph also favored his two tow-headed grandchildren, ten-year-old Nancy, and Quentin, nine. He was aware that like most successful young men, his son-in-law occasionally strayed off the pasture, but relied on Sandy's essential good sense not to do anything rashly indiscreet. He had taken Sandy aside shortly after he had married his daughter and said, "Now, Sandy, you got a chance to get it all. You're one of us. You're going to be big, but that means living up to a lot. I like you, but I love my daughter. She's the only one I've got. You ever do

one thing to hurt her and I'll crush you like a dried husk."

Sandy had given old Quent his most sincere eyeball to eyeball look, firmly squeezed his father-in-law's hand and said, "I'd want you to, sir." Privately he'd thought that this crazy old bastard probably would be as good as his word. Old Quent was not a man to be trifled with in business or family matters.

Sandy wanted his marriage to Beverly to succeed. Hell, she was the girl who had everything: beauty, breeding, wealth, but she was also one of the most *sang-froid*, self-controlled women he had ever bedded. He had been faithful for the first three years of their marriage, but it was like sleeping with an ice box. Before his marriage, Sandy had had affairs with a number of lusty, expressive young women who really enjoyed sex.

Early on, Sandy became aware that Beverly believed she met her own standards of perfection. It was therefore almost impossible for him to urge her to see a gynecologist.

"What for?" she asked loftily. "There's nothing wrong with me. You're not exactly a stallion, you know." But Sandy, who had had a close look at her in moments of intimacy, was absolutely certain she was in need of a dorsal clip, a very minor bit of surgery to correct a hooded clitoris.

For several years he enjoyed brief relationships wherever he travelled—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami. But only when he started dallying in New Orleans with Rena did he become emotionally involved. It was a relationship fraught with danger: Quent Randolph was a Ku Klux Klansman. Perversely, this made Rena somehow dearer to him.

Sandy did not doubt that if Quent found out, he'd have him castrated.

Beverly Bateman swept into her mansion shortly after midnight, following a dreary concert at Memorial Auditorium. Old Andrew, the butler, gave her her phone messages.

She settled down in the den, drink in hand, and waited for the return call from an Englishman named Bert White, speculating on who he was.

The phone rang and Andrew picked it up in the hall. After a moment he brought it in to her. "It's Mr. White, m'am."

Beverly took the phone. "Yes, this is Beverly Bateman."

"Bert White, here."

She liked the rich, masculine, yet cultivated, voice.

"I'm sorry, Mr. White, I can't place you."

"No, you wouldn't; you don't know me. But what I've got to say is important to you."

He was slurring his words and she sensed that he was under the influence of alcohol.

"Well then, what is it?"

She heard the man take a deep breath before speaking. "I feel like a rat about this, but he's been carrying on with my wife. He's ruined it for me while I've been in the service fighting for my country."

Beverly was aware that in voicing his complaint Mr. White had acquired a southern accent; and the tone of his voice sounded decidedly negro. "Mr. White," she said, "you are an American, I take it."

"That's right."

"A negro?"

"Right again," he said, his voice hardening, "and my wife, she's a nigger, too. And your husband has got her set up in fancy digs, with a maid of her own, on Beauregard Square here in New Orleans. I just thought you ought to know."

She heard what Bert White had told her, but had not quite assimilated the import of the message. Automatically she said, "Is there anything else, Mr. White?"

"No'm, that's it."

"Then good night." And she hung up.

Three days later Rena received a brief letter from Sandy explaining what had happened, and a certified check for five thousand dollars. He was sorry, he wrote, but he would be out on the street unless he broke off the relationship.

Rena ground her teeth in rage. She had sincerely liked Sandy. He had treated her like a lady and had always been decent, but that sonofabitch Bert deserved the worst.

An hour later she had made her mind up. She telephoned the Five Spot Cafe and asked for Bubba. In a few well-chosen words she told Bubba what Bert had done.

"Mmmmm-mmmmm," hummed Bubba, "he done killed the golden goose. And after all you done for him, too."

"That's right, exactly right, Bubba. He's into me for several thousand dollars."

"Mmmmm-Mmmmm."

"Is Big Max around?"

"You not gonna have Bert killed, are you?"

Rena tried to keep the fury out of her voice. "No, I don't want him killed, roughed up a bit maybe . . . scared half to death."

"Well, Big Max can do that without even touchin' him."

"Listen, Bubba, you tell Max the story and tell him to give Bert a good scare, whup him some, but not to make it fatal. I'll give him a fast hundred bucks. Okay?"

"Okay," grumbled Bubba. "I suppose Bert deserves it. He's a no-good bastard, takin' the bread outta the mouths of his wife and child. I'll do it."

The following morning Bert White was admitted to the Sisters of Mercy Hospital suffering from a broken left arm, a broken right leg, numerous contusions and abrasions and a dislocated jaw. It was thought that he had been the victim of a hit and run driver, and it was so recorded on the hospital register and the police blotter.

For the next several months Jimmy Lee worked hard and long at his new career. The southern evangelical campaign took him to remote corners of Mississippi, Arkansas, and Missouri and later, as far north as Minnesota and Wisconsin. Most of the time he was without Rachel and little Sarah. His happiest moments came when his wife and child were able to join him during an infrequent break in the tour.

"It's like falling in love all over again," Rachel told him, "when we finally get together again." As indeed it was; Rachel was pregnant again.

With a new baby coming Jimmy Lee was forced to do some planning for the future. He'd always had a general idea of what he wanted for Rachel and their children. Now he had to carry out those plans, with his wife's approval, of course.

"Sweetheart," he said, "do you fancy Mint Hill?"
Rachel gave him a steady look. "You know I think it's

wonderful country."

"Suppose you had your own little home?"

Rachel's face was wreathed in smiles. "Not too close to your daddy's big house."

Jimmy Lee took Rachel in his arms. "Darling girl, the folks have given us some property and a little to build. I've saved some and the organization is going to provide us with the rest. If you approve you'll have a house of your own in time for the new baby."

Rachel was overjoyed. "I take it," she said, "that the organization's generosity indicates that they are happy with you."

"I think they are satisfied," Jimmy Lee reflected, "but I'm not."

"What's wrong, darling?"

"Oh, on balance things have been going pretty well, but you know, every now and then we'll hit some town and, even after we've done everything possible to drum up business, we have a half-empty tent. We had to cancel out in Texarkana, Arkansas, because there was a rodeo playing in the next town."

"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away," Rachel said sweetly.

Six months later, Rachel and Sarah moved into a snug fieldstone and timber ranch house high atop Anderson's Rise in the Windsor Forest area. Soon after Jimmy Lee got his first view of the house. That same week Rachel presented him with a second daughter, whom they promptly named Rachel Ann.

It was a real old-fashioned homecoming for Jimmy Lee, with the whole family, except Rafe, present. Sarah Hawkes was slightly grayer and perhaps a little fuller of

body, but she was still erect and walked with a firm step. Angus Hawkes looked well enough, though he'd never fully recovered from being gored by the bull.

The first chance Jimmy Lee had he made his way down to Damon's cabin to see his old mentor. How many years had passed since he used to tread nightly on this path to see his lady love? Twelve, he thought. How many lifetimes ago it now seemed, and how sweet, beautiful, and vulnerable Rena had been then. Where was she now? Still in New Orleans with her husband, he supposed. He knocked on the back door and called out, "Damon, it's Jimmy Lee. Damon, are you there?"

The old man who answered the door looked unlike the Damon he remembered. It was at least five years since Jimmy Lee had seen him, and in that time the old preacher had aged radically. Now he put on some unframed spectacles and peered at his guest. "The Lord's been good to you, son. You must cut a grand figure in the pulpit."

"Don't use one in the tent, Damon. Just walk back and forth on a stand."

"You do, you do for a fact. Come in, son. Come in and have some mint tea, brewed fresh it is."

As the old black preacher and the young white evangelist talked over old times, it was inevitable that the conversation veer toward Rena.

"What's she up to, Damon? Rachel tell you we saw her in Chicago? Dressed something splendid. She and the boy looked very well. Rich, even."

"Yes," Damon nodded, pursing his lips. "Your wife told me. Your wife's a fine woman, Jimmy Lee. Real quality. Black folks around here think highly of her. You a lucky man."

"I know, I know," Jimmy Lee responded, "but what about Rena. How is she? Is she still singing?"

The old man leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. "I don't rightly know. I heard from her a few months ago. She don't write often, hardly at all. That musician fellow she was married to—he took off, so she was getting a divorce."

"A divorce," Jimmy Lee interrupted. "What a shame. She looked so well when I saw her."

Before Jimmy Lee left, Damon gave him the last address he had for Rena. Jimmy Lee had said if he passed through New Orleans sometime soon he would definitely try to look her up and let Damon know how she was doing.

"Son," Damon said, "it would please me greatly if you would kneel with me and say a prayer."

"I know of no other man on earth I would rather pray with."

"Thankee, thankee son." With some difficulty Damon went to his knees on the worn kitchen floor. Jimmy Lee was by him, his arm flung around the old man's shoulder.

"Oh, dearly beloved Saviour," Damon began, his voice rich and strong, "guide this young servant who has chosen to work for You, to paths of righteousness. Let him not fall victim to pretty words, to vanity . . ."

The words stabbed into Jimmy Lee's consciousness. The old man knew him better than anyone, knew that he had a tendency toward egocentricity.

Damon continued, "Help him, Oh, Lord, to save many souls, and in saving them, not lose his own. Keep him strong, always, to wage his battle against the devil."

Walking back in the darkness to his new house Jimmy Lee meditated on his meeting with Damon. The old man

was failing, yet he had remarkable insight. In that prayer, in a few words, he told me that I have to be concerned about getting a swelled head, about confusing my limited success as all my own, and not the work of God.

Jimmy Lee stopped for a moment, clasped his hands together, looked heavenwards, and said: "Help me, oh Lord, to be more like your servant, Damon, a truly saintly man."

ELEVEN

"Twenty-four hundred North Peters Street," Jimmy Lee told the cab driver.

The cabbie turned to examine his fare. "You sure you want to go to that area? It's rough down there. I can get you what you're lookin' for without taking no unnecessary risks."

Jimmy Lee bristled. "Thank you just the same. I want to go to North Peters Street."

"All right," the driver grumbled. "Just don't say I didn't warn yuh." He threw the car into gear and lurched off.

Jimmy Lee, Harold Pink, and a new man, a singer, Austin MacIntosh, had arrived in New Orleans earlier that day en route to Baton Rouge. As soon as possible, he

broke away from his companions to search out Rena.

After a couple of moments he saw what the cabbie had been referring to. As they made their way down North Peters, the neighborhood became progressively worse. Clearly one of the poorer areas of New Orleans, it was inhabited by blacks who appeared to be almost content to live in the streets. Both sides of the avenue were jammed with late afternoon crowds bent, it would seem, on devil's missions. Numerous drunks were reeling around and several prostitutes were looking for business.

Jimmy Lee had examined his conscience before he set out on his search and assured himself that his intentions were of the highest. But then, the devil works in strange ways. No, he was convinced there would be no element of temptation involved in seeing his old love. It was absolutely necessary that he find her for Damon's sake, who had not heard from her for almost a year.

Jimmy Lee paid the driver and stepped out of the taxi. Dusk had fallen and the street lights were dim. He made his way to the fronts of one or two houses to find the numbers. Carefully he stepped around a group of young girls skipping rope. As he spotted number twenty-four hundred a tall, willowy heavily made-up black girl sidled up to him and said, "Ooooo, I've been waitin' for you all my life. Wanna change your luck?"

Jimmy Lee squinted at the woman and then realized it was a man. He brushed by the transvestite and made his way up the steps of twenty-four hundred, a sorry-looking yellow brick building. He rang the bell and waited while the queen, standing on the sidewalk behind him, made sucking noises with his lips. This place, Jimmy Lee thought, is a modern Sodom.

The door swung open a crack to reveal a small, yellow-

faced woman. She blinked her little shoe button eyes and asked, "What is it, young man?"

"I'm looking for Mrs. Rena White."

The diminutive lady nodded. "I'll see if she's in. Jes' a minit." She returned in a minute and admitted him to a dimly lit hallway which was cluttered with old furniture.

"First flo, to the right, number fo," she whispered, pointing up the darkened stairway.

He ran up the steps, his chest tightening and sweat beading in his armpits. He was actually trembling. Good God, this visit was tremendously important to him and he was just this minute realizing it. He turned right, walked down the hall to number four and knocked. He waited for Rena to answer the door; but when it finally opened his mouth dropped with surprise.

It was almost five years since Jimmy Lee first saw his son in the elevator of the Hotel Drake in Chicago. He was almost eleven years old now and tall for his age. His face had become more angular and he, more than ever, looked like a dusky version of his father. He had the Hawkes' high-bridged nose, and slate-green eyes, but most of all, it was his wavy brown hair that made him resemble Jimmy Lee.

He was dressed in a dark blue Cub Scout uniform with a small blue cap on his head, which he took off when he greeted Jimmy Lee. "Mama says to come in and sit down. She'll be with you in a minute. I'm going to a meetin'." With that, he darted by Jimmy Lee and ran down the stairs.

Jimmy Lee was stunned by the swiftness of the meeting. He had been unprepared for this chance encounter with little Damon. He might have known he would be there. All he'd been thinking about was seeing

Rena. And then she walked in the room.

"Hi there, big fellah, it's good to see you." She extended a hand as she walked across the room to greet him.

Jimmy Lee vainly tried to compose himself, but could not. Impulsively he brought her hand up to his mouth with both of his and kissed it long and lovingly.

Rena stood silently, then drew her hand away, patted him on the cheek, and motioned to a battered arm chair. "Sit down, Jimmy Lee. It's clean, if not nifty.

"Can I get you a coke? I spike mine with gin or rum, but I'll give you yours straight." She chuckled and handed him a glass. "You look fine, Jimmy Lee. I knew it was you; been expecting you."

"Damon?"

She nodded.

"Have you written him?"

She pouted and shook her head no. "No, he'd want to come here and visit, or have us go there. I couldn't do that."

Dully, Jimmy Lee asked, "Why not?"

She looked at him for a brief moment and said, "You've seen little Damon. I can't let my father know about him; about us."

Of course, the child's resemblance to the Hawkes family was now so pronounced anyone could see he was related to them. "I . . . I . . . should have known. I'm sorry." The sins of the father are visited upon the son, poor little Damon must be hidden from all his grandparents lest they find out that he is a half-breed bastard.

Jimmy Lee waited a moment, then said, "He seems to be a nice boy, a boy scout and all. He's a credit

to you."

Rena laughed and finished off her drink, then fixed another.

Her body was beautifully molded in a white silk robe with fringes of white feathers at the throat and cuffs. It made a startling contrast with her dark velvet skin. As she walked, first one leg and then the other broke through the front pleat of the robe. They were as long and supple as he remembered. Without realizing it he was taking a physical inventory of her, fixing on every curve and hillock, studying every nook and cranny.

He felt his pulse beating in his temples. He watched, fascinated, as she lit up a cigarette and blew the smoke through her nostrils. She laughed and took another drag. "You can't fool me, Jimmy Lee. You got the old hunger. I can feel it; it's heavy in the air."

"I know. It's terrible, after all these years."

Rena took another drink. "It's not that terrible. It's human nature but human beings warp good decent feelings."

He was dimly aware that her remarks were directed specifically at him, but he was too occupied with her to conjure the meaning of her words. As she talked the lower part of her robe fell away from her legs revealing their firm, shapely contours. He sprang across the room as she stood up and let the robe drop to the floor. She was just as he remembered her, just as he saw her in his dreams. He took her in his arms and pressed his lips into her open mouth, a rictus of moist, warm flesh that tasted of gin and tobacco.

"Yes, yes, yes," she crooned, "take me the way you used to," and her hands helped him undress. His hands moved over her body like frightened birds not knowing

where to perch. They clasped her breasts, buttocks, thighs, loins, belly, calves. They were everywhere at once.

Her hands, at once sensitive and knowledgeable, cupped his scrotum and slowly drew him into her. As one they sighed, and then began the slow rhythmic dance of the flesh. After a moment or two she came, and then came again, her orgasm milking him deep.

They rested in silence in each other's arms for a while, and then Rena expertly brought him to a full erection again. They made love slowly before they mutually climaxed. When Rena went to wash up Jimmy Lee nervously looked at his watch. He had to go. He couldn't stay here and make small talk, the flabby-souled, hypocritical man-of-God. He was dressing when Rena came back in the room.

"Oh," she said, "you're going. I had hoped we could spend some time together." She sounded hurt.

Jimmy Lee knotted his tie. "I know, Rena. I'm sorry. I've got to get ready for a campaign in Baton Rouge."

She walked over and hugged him and then, sensing his reserve, his unwillingness to return her embrace, she pushed away from him and walked out of the room. She was wearing her robe when he walked into the living room.

"I see you've got the 'guilties,'" she said, taking a long pull at her glass.

Jimmy Lee stood silently for a moment. "By my standards it's the wrong thing to do."

Rena laughed mirthlessly. "Jimmy Lee, Jimmy Lee, why don't you just face up to things? You love to make love, especially with me. I'm the same way. Only way we can avoid making love together is to avoid seeing one

another. That's a fact, preacher."

Cheerlessly he said, "I guess you're right. But it's not only physical, Rena; I love you . . . did love you . . . want the best for you and the boy."

Rena gave him a hard look. "Well," she said, "as long as you brought it up. The little nipper *is* yours."

Jimmy Lee flinched inwardly; he didn't like her tone.

She looked quietly at him for a moment and said, "Relax, I'm not going to ask you for any money." She paused and added, "Now."

Jimmy Lee nodded.

"You see," said Rena, "that no-good I was married to ruined things for me. I was set up right nice. Had a nice bank account and all. You know how things were. You saw me in Chicago that time."

Jimmy Lee said, "Yes. You looked extremely well."

"Well, I'm tapped out now. Broke, but I'm going to work next week and things will be all right. But if I got sick or anything, I'd like to be sure that little Damon was all right."

"I understand," Jimmy Lee said.

"I'll try to never have either of us bother you. I know you've got your own family. What is it? Two girls?"

Jimmy Lee nodded.

"Well, that's all, Jimmy Lee. It was nice."

Jimmy Lee moved as if to give her a farewell kiss, but Rena extended her hand for him to shake. There was a complete finality in the gesture.

"It seems odd," he said, "to just shake hands, after all we've meant to one another."

"I know," she said, "but you started thinking like a preacher . . ."

He nodded. "I know. That's the trouble. That's what I

am, I'm not a salesman."

Jimmy Lee gloomily made his way down North Peters Street. All my good intentions right down the drain, he thought. I just can't help myself with some women, especially black women like Rena and Daolah. But he knew he was attracted to beautiful white women, too. He was deeply attracted, thank God, to his wife. I've got to work harder than ever on myself and try to develop more control.

A thought suddenly occurred to him. Suppose he had made Rena pregnant again? Good God! He automatically started to pray as he walked up the street. He stopped only when he saw a taxi and hailed it.

What sort of Pandora's box had he opened up by going to see Rena? One good thing had come about because of the visit: he now knew that he had to do something besides pray for little Damon. Somehow or other he would have to send money to Rena for the boy. It was only right. Not that money alone would relieve him of any responsibility. With Rena drinking almost anything could happen to her. If she died, what would become of little Damon?

For the next two years, Jimmy Lee drove himself mercilessly. His evangelical schedule was so crowded that he was able to see his wife and children only one week in every ten. The constant preaching gave him an added polish and expertise and made him an extremely effective speaker. Now, when he bounded up to the platform, Jimmy Lee Hawkes really brought an audience to life.

For some time Austin MacIntosh, Harold Pink, and Jimmy Lee had toyed with the idea of breaking away from

the Fight For Christ organization to begin their own independent evangelical work. Until now, only the influence of Wayne Crandall kept Jimmy Lee quiet and tractable, but when Wayne announced he was joining Fight For Christ International in Europe, Jimmy Lee made his plans.

Jimmy Lee was convinced that if he worked hard and talked from the heart he could retrieve lost souls. He knew he had "a way with him," at least in front of large groups. He had felt that power in the last year or two. So had Austin MacIntosh and Harold Pink, which was why they were joining him in forming "The Holy Struggle." The first stop on their campaign was to be Chicago, and Jimmy Lee was elated that Rachel would be joining him.

TWELVE

Rena was living on Beauregard Square again. She thanked God that she managed to shake loose of North Peters Street, though of course she knew that God had nothing to do with it. For a while it had looked as if she might go under from drinking just a little too much. It was Wanda Johannson who took an interest in her, straightened her out, put her on recovery road, and showed her how to succeed in her profession as a madame.

Wanda had passed away six months ago, but before her demise she showed Rena the ropes. Rena ran a good house because of what she learned from Wanda. No one ever got rolled at "Wanda's," and now that Rena was the boss that rule was still enforced. Although the clientele

was exclusively white, the girls were both black and white, and were reputed to be the most beautiful in the southwest.

Wanda had learned the business in Paris and Hamburg before the first World War, and she knew what it took to run a successful brothel. "No one catch's the crabs at Wanda's" was one of the old lady's favorite expressions. Her other major prohibition was directed against perversions. Rena still observed her taboos, and the house prospered. It was indeed a lucky day when Bubba introduced her to old Wanda at the Five Spot.

In the beginning Rena was absolutely sure nothing would come of her encounter with the elderly Swedish woman. Then the next morning, Mrs. Johannson showed up at Rena's apartment and announced they were going to Europe.

"You're really serious," Rena said unbelievingly.

"Completely. Didn't you listen to anything I had to say last night or were you too drunk? I explained the whole business to you, but here it is again.

"You've been the mistress of a very wealthy white man, and you are celebrated as the best-looking package in this town. You have had your pick, but you turned to drink." Wanda clenched a silver cigarette holder between her teeth. "You've got something very rare, and European men will pay dearly for it. It's a quality only one in ten thousand women have . . ."

Rena smiled, "You sound like a man now."

Wanda nodded. "I know what men want and that's what I'm getting at. You have that spark, that incredible sexual appeal that sets you apart from other beautiful women. Lola Montez had it. I've seen it where I've least expected it, in quiet housewives, in peasant women,

even, and you may not believe this, in a nun."

Rena studied the woman sitting opposite her. In her own way Wanda was a distinguished looking woman of indeterminate age, but well over sixty. Her ice-blue eyes now carried heavy pouches below them, but one could see the vestiges of lost beauty in that tired but animated face.

"So, you silly goose," Wanda said, slapping a hand on the arm of the chair, "stop studying my wrinkles and make up your mind."

"I'd have to make arrangements for my son."

"Naturally, he couldn't go along on this trip. But it wouldn't be for long. Six or eight months at the most."

Rena raised her brows in disbelief. "We could have a nice little nest egg in that time?"

"That's all it would take. We aren't going to try to break the bank at Monte Carlo. All we want are a few tidy little gifts in a few cities. That's all it will take. I'm going to make you into what the Greeks called a *hetaera*."

"What in God's name is that?"

"That's the highest-class bought woman in the world. That's way above what the French call a *poule de luxe*."

Three weeks later Damon was placed in a Catholic military school near New York City. It was expensive, but Rena was assured Damon would get a good education, wholesome food, and most important, there were three other black cadets enrolled there. Damon didn't like anything about the arrangement, but reluctantly went along with the plan.

"Work hard," urged Rena, "get good grades, and we'll be back together before you know it."

Damon didn't believe a word of it and hugged his

mother as hard as he could when it came time to say goodbye.

The old madam and her protégée flew to Paris the next day. They went, as befitted their future station, first class, but Wanda would allow Rena only one glass of champagne. "You're in training now, honey. I don't want you to muddy up your complexion."

Rena's career as a modern *hetaera* got off to a sensational start by accident when she started singing again. Shortly after the two women arrived in Paris they had dinner in the Rond Point area and then strolled away from the restaurant. Quite by accident they stumbled upon one of Paris's most popular nightclubs, *Chez Carroll*, a *bôite* which had become a favorite of numerous Americans living in the City of Light.

Rena and Wanda entered the lavishly appointed bar and were shown to a banquette. They ordered a split of champagne but before they could settle back and look around a tall, light-skinned black walked over and very casually said, "Hi Rena, how's tricks?"

Naturally, Rena was stunned. She was absolutely sure she knew no one in Paris. She knew the face, but the name eluded her. "It's Lionel . . . Lionel something."

"That's right," he nodded graciously.

"I got it. Lionel Roland. That's right. Lionel Roland. You're an artist. You used to come into the Five Spot all the time."

For the next hour, much to Wanda's disapproval, Rena played the game of "you remember" with the young artist but before the evening was out Rena had auditioned with the band in the downstairs nightclub. The management liked her and hired her for one week.

"We renew," said Freddie, the owner, "at a better figure if the customers like you." Freddie, manfully dressed, was tall, slender, and striking-looking, with closely-cropped hair. "You don't like girls, do you?" she asked in charmingly accented English, patting Rena on the cheek.

"Not yet," Rena replied with a smile.

"Pity," Freddie said and walked away.

Word soon spread through Paris that an absolutely stunning new black singer was appearing twice nightly at Carroll's. The audiences built rapidly, and after a spectacular first week, Rena's contract was renewed at twice the money for another month.

"Chicken feed," Wanda said of her salary. "Now we go after the big money—Prince Aladdin Sabry—a charming Egyptian, and a very generous man."

"How old is he?"

"About forty-seven or forty-eight. Quite young-looking and strong for his age. He's a fine polo player."

Although Rena couldn't believe it, the arrangement worked very well. Aladdin Sabry was a quiet, pensive man who had nevertheless cut quite an exciting figure all over Europe in his younger days. An extremely wealthy man, he still liked to be the center of attention. Rena was exactly what he needed.

He actually courted her, treated her as though their affair had been seduction and not a form of commercial contract. Usually, Aladdin sought to be with her two and, at the most three, nights a week, and insisted she stop singing at Carroll's. Freddie, who was most understanding, let her out of her contract.

The prince ensconced Rena and her Swedish *macrel* in a small but beautifully appointed apartment on the

Avenue Foch. For the next few weeks she traveled to various spas and watering spots with Aladdin. First it was Deauville, where the prince won heavily at the casino, therefore purchasing his first significant gift for Rena, a diamond bracelet from Van Cleef and Arpels.

Wanda lived in state at the apartment on Avenue Foch and at Aladdin's urging retained a private tutor to teach Rena French. "You must try to learn French," said Aladdin, "if we are to communicate."

Their arrangement had been in force almost five months when Rena reached a decision. She had made a tremendous effort to learn French, but a real mastery of the language eluded her. She realized, however, that it was not just language that was a barrier to a more complaisant relationship with her lover. He really wanted to be with his horses and dogs at his stud farm in Rambouillet, she realized. He liked sex now and then, but it was in a special compartment of his highly organized life.

After several contemplative hours she expressed her thoughts to Wanda. "The poor guy wants to trot me out in my best clothes a couple of times a month, wants to bed me down now and then, but most of all he wants me to just go away. He's got a majolica collection and reads history books. Really, we don't have a damned thing in common.

"Besides," added Rena, tears glistening in her eyes, "I miss Little Damon, and I want to see Big Damon too. I'm worried about him."

Wanda shook her head. "It's a mistake, a great mistake, but not exactly financial ruin. We have quite a tidy sum set by. Aladdin has been generous. I'm sure he'll give you a wonderful farewell gift, too. You just see if he doesn't."

Rena had learned the value of her flawless black body and Wanda had instructed her on fiscal responsibility. Now she wanted to return home and see her son, now thirteen. He had been well taken care of for the ten months she was away, she was assured, but she wanted to see for herself that he was all right.

Just before the *Isle de France* pulled into New York harbor Mrs. Johannson asked Rena what she had learned from the trip.

Rena smiled, "If you got the money, honey, you all right. If you ain't, you ain't."

Wanda Johannson smiled and said, "You learned good. Now you'll retire and we'll let some nice girls work for us."

And that was how Rena became a well-to-do madam. When Mrs. Johannson died six months later, Rena gave her one of the most dignified funerals the city had ever seen, burying her in a small, gothic-style, white marble mausoleum. When anyone asked about the late Mrs. Johannson she would say, "She was like a mother to me." And she would tolerate no laughter on the subject, even from a good friend like Bubba.

"You got to do the best you can with what you got," she told Bubba. "I don't drink anymore because of what that old lady taught me. Just a little Southern Comfort, now and again. Sure, she was what you would call eccentric, but that's why she took an interest in me. Otherwise, even though I had good friends like you, I would have been much *en merdé*."

"What's 'at?'" Bubba asked.

"Oh, in French it doesn't sound bad, but in English it means . . . be shitted."

"Say it again, say it again," said Bubba. "It is the truth."

The opening of Jimmy Lee's Holy Struggle Crusade was heralded by a front-page story in Chicago's biggest newspaper. "Rural Evangelist Starts Chicago Campaign" the headline read, and the story went on to say that Jimmy Lee was renowned all over the south for the sincerity of his preaching as much as for its eloquence.

"God has answered our prayers," Jimmy Lee said to Rachel.

As the day before the opening dragged on Jimmy Lee worked at the headquarters of "Salvation for Chicago" with his colleagues and their wives. They answered telephone inquiries, and consulted with numerous ministers, all of whom were interested in the attempt at a religious revival in a city so celebrated for its wide-open sinfulness. Finally, at 4 p.m., Rachel took him aside and said, "Time for you to go back to the hotel. Maybe you can grab a nap for an hour and then get back here at seven."

"Thanks, darling, I need to retreat into myself. This is an all important meeting."

Jimmy Lee went back to his hotel room and prayed on his knees for an hour, then went to bed and slept for an hour. He awoke alert and refreshed, ready to do battle with the devil.

Jimmy Lee hailed a cab outside the hotel and gave the address on East Chestnut. The cab driver didn't turn around. "I've had quite a few fares out there early this evening."

"That's good news," Jimmy Lee said heartily. The driver looked in his windshield mirror and his eyes

met Jimmy Lee's. "Oh, you're the evangelist they're all talking about. They're expecting big things out of you."

"The Lord willing, brother, the Lord willing."

The cab approached an intersection a few blocks from East Chestnut, which was blocked by a traffic tie-up. "You see, Reverend, that tent of yours has a mob around it that's slowing everything down. You gonna be sold out tonight. Sold out."

Jimmy Lee's heart jumped. He paid the cabbie with a good-sized tip and said, "Bless you, brother, come visit us. I'll walk the rest of the way." With that he moved swiftly out of the cab and up the street toward the tent. Within minutes he was caught up in the tightly packed crowd waiting to be admitted. He quickly made his way inside and found Harold Pink. "Harold, I think we ought to let them into the tent, or we'll lose them."

Harold nodded. "Just got the public address system set up and the band's ready, so we're ready for 'em. Open up," he yelled, and the faithful poured in to hear the word of God from the Reverend Jimmy Lee Hawkes.

It was a memorable night for everyone connected with the crusade. Everything seemed to succeed. The crowd applauded even when the audience sang hymns; they called for encores when the boys' choir sang, and cheered and cried for more every time Austin MacIntosh sang. However, their most tremendous reception was accorded Jimmy Lee from the moment he appeared on the platform like a wingless angel in a blue serge suit.

Rachel wept as her prayers were answered. Jimmy Lee spoke from the heart, persuasively, simply, compassionately. And he moved his audience too, one could see it and feel it. These weren't simple folk from the backwoods areas who were pious fundamentalists. They were, some

of them, hard-looking, spent and tired, the abused of a great city, lost in the shuffle and seeking guidance and God's word, and Jimmy Lee gave it to them.

"And now," Jimmy Lee was saying to the crowd, "now comes the time to change your life, to make yourself right with God, to show that you have faith in Our Lord, an all forgiving Lord. If you feel you now want to accept Christ as your personal Savior, just walk down the aisle to the platform where you will be joined by one of our volunteer counselors. Don't be embarrassed, we are here for the same reason . . . to accept Christ. Perhaps tonight is your turn not to reject Christ."

As Jimmy Lee talked a small number of men and women of all ages rose from their chairs and made their way through the crowded aisles to the platform. Soon there were hundreds of people making their declarations for Christ.

The next day's headlines read: "The Reverend Jimmy Scores Success in Chicago." Jimmy Hawkes had brought about nothing less than a religious renaissance in Chicago, the article stated. "If even a small percentage of those individuals who declared themselves tonight continue to practice their faith, then Chicago is going to be a safer and better city to live in."

The story about Jimmy Lee was syndicated all over the country with a flattering picture of the young evangelist in a candid and dramatic pose.

Jimmy Lee Hawkes had become news.

Later that week they began to feel the true impact of the newspaper story when news clippings were mailed to them from as far away as Alaska and Hong Kong. There were over a hundred small contributions too, in amounts

varying from one to ten dollars.

For the balance of the campaign the tent on East Chestnut Street was packed to overflowing. Every night the sidewalks were crammed with thousands of the faithful listening to Jimmy Lee preach over public address-systems set up outside the tent. As a result other newsmen covered the story: the tale of the rural minister who was saving souls in the big city captured the imagination of the country and Jimmy Lee was filmed by newsreel cameramen and even interviewed for several different radio programs, some of them to be aired over national networks. Truly, a new and significant religious leader was born.

One night, late in the campaign, Jimmy Lee received a call from Mint Hill, from his old friend and mentor, Damon Daniels. He would recognize the old man's voice anywhere. "Damon, how good of you to call," he said, genuinely touched.

"I'm at your daddy's house, with your mother and daddy. They're proud of you, son. I'm proud of you, jes' everybody's proud. We heard you on the radio, son. God bless you. Here's your mam."

Sarah Hawkes got on the line. "It's just as Damon said, we know that you will succeed in the Lord's work." Jimmy Lee's father got on next, snuffled out one or two words of greeting and then said, "Gawd Bless son, we can't afford to stay on the wire too long," and hung up.

Instead of elating him, the calls had the opposite affect. How truly good Damon and my parents are, he thought. I must be worthy of them all. How I have abused Damon's trust with his daughter, his grandchild!

Both Harold Pink and Austin MacIntosh urged Jimmy Lee to take advantage of the national publicity garnered

during the Chicago campaign. He, too, realized he must make the most of his new fame, and agreed to appear in several major cities across the country in the next several weeks.

In Detroit, Jimmy Lee's Holy Struggle was judged a success although they took the campaign into too large a stadium. They drew crowds of fifteen thousand almost every night for ten days, but in an arena that held fifty thousand the audiences appeared meager.

Things picked up in Indianapolis; grew even better in Oklahoma City; but the most successful crusade of all was conducted in Denver. However, Jimmy Lee had been forced to consult a voice teacher and a doctor because of a sore throat. On doctor's orders, he decided to take a good solid month off and return home to give his voice a rest.

The night before he was scheduled to leave he received a phone call from Bill Enderby, a Unitarian minister in Washington, D. C., whom he had met years before at seminary in Sarasota.

The two old friends exchanged pleasantries for a moment, then Enderby asked, "Guess you're wondering why I'm calling?"

"Well," Jimmy Lee said, "I figure you have a problem you might want me to work out for you."

"Dry, dry," he said. "You always were dry, Jimmy Lee. No, that isn't it. Your outfit doesn't have a publicity man, or any connections with a church lobby here in Washington does it?"

"No," said Jimmy Lee, "we have trusted in the Lord, and a friendly reporter. They've done a good job for us so far."

"Darned if they haven't," Reverend Enderby ex-

claimed. "Well, I have an opportunity for you to meet the president, if you've a mind to do it."

"What's that?"

"I can set up an interview with President Truman for you and your aides if you'd like it."

Jimmy Lee was silent for a moment. "I'd like it fine," he said.

"I figured you might. Just meet me in Washington in three days. I'll have rooms for you at the Hay-Adams hotel. Your appointment will be for later that day. Naturally, the press will cover your visit."

He was trembling with excitement when he hung up. This meant he had really arrived. He was established; there was no doubt about it. When the President of the United States received you it could be interpreted as an endorsement. A man in his high office entertained no frauds or charlatans. As this thought struck him, he went to his knees and offered up a prayer of thanksgiving.

Slim, young, and the prototype of a clean-cut young minister, Bill Enderby greeted Jimmy Lee, Pink and MacIntosh with warmth.

"We will walk to the White House," Enderby explained. "It's a short way across Lafayette Park and we're there." He pointed the way and the group headed out of the hotel.

Jimmy Lee threw his shoulders back and struck out confidently, walking with his easy rhythm. He was nervous, though. This was one of the biggest moments in his life, a private meeting with the President of the United States, almost unheard of for a man of cloth. He was told that the president ordinarily received ministers in delegations of forty to fifty. What would he say to

him? Mr. Truman was obviously a God-fearing man. Though he went to church, he also had the reputation of being a salty old man who could swear like a mule skinner when he was provoked.

It was in this frame of mind that Jimmy Lee strolled to the White House. They were routinely checked through the gate before they proceeded up the winding driveway to the main entrance of the historic old building.

"Well, here goes," said Austin MacIntosh. "I can truthfully say that I voted for him last time."

"Well, I can't," said Jimmy Lee. "I forgot to register."

"Don't tell him that," said Bill Enderby with a laugh. "Just make small talk. He does this all the time."

They were met by an extremely businesslike, dark-skinned man who quickly shook hands all around and guided them up the stairway. He led them into a small office and introduced them to the appointments secretary who quickly apprised herself of everyone's name. She checked the names off on a list, walked to a door, swung it open, and they were in a sitting room with the president. The appointments secretary quickly introduced them and each man, in turn, stepped up to the president and briefly shook his hand.

Jimmy Lee was first to be addressed by the president. Smiling, he said, "Good of you to see us, sir, especially since you're so busy."

"Ummmooomph," said President Truman.

"What's that, sir?"

"Phlegm," Mr. Truman said. Taking out a crisp linen handkerchief, he spat in it. "Got a miserable throat. Talk too much."

"I suffer from the same malady," Jimmy Lee said, "for the same reason."

"What do you do for it?" the president asked.

"Best thing I've used is a honey and lemon compound."

"Hasn't worked on me. Only rest, rest that's the thing."

Mr. Truman turned from Jimmy Lee to talk briefly with his other guests. Then he turned and seemed to wink at his appointments secretary, perhaps to signal her that the interview was over. Bill Enderby caught the sign and said, "May we offer up a prayer, Mr. President?"

President Truman shot Enderby a baleful look. "By all means. I need all the help I can get."

After Jimmy Lee led them in a short prayer Mr. Truman walked with him to the door. "Remember this, son; there're plenty of scallawags around. In your business as well as mine."

"I know, I know," said Jimmy Lee as he exited, wondering what the president was getting at.

Three men were walking up the wide stairway as Jimmy Lee and his party descended. One of them, a well-tailored, fleshy man with narrow eyes, paused and said to Jimmy Lee, "Reverend Hawkes, I'm Bruce Benton, publisher of *Newsfront*, *Picture World*."

Jimmy Lee was startled but kept his composure. Bruce Benton was universally regarded as one of the most powerful men in the country. "I know who you are, Mr. Benton. It's a pleasant surprise to find you know me."

Benton waved Jimmy Lee's modest words aside and said, "Have dinner tonight with me at my suite in the Sheraton Park."

"Certainly, a pleasure, sir. Can I bring any of my staff?" He pointed to Austin and Harold who had walked on ahead of him.

"I'd rather you and I have a chance to talk alone."

"Fine, Mr. Benton."

"Say, six-thirty."

Jimmy Lee rejoined his group and told them of Benton's invitation and their faces wreathed in smiles. "Great Godfrey," Bill Enderby said enthusiastically, "if that man takes an interest in you, we can run you for president. If you had tried to make an appointment with him it would have taken a year to get five minutes of his time. Now he just falls into your lap!"

That evening Jimmy Lee put on a new suit, shirt, and tie which made him appear more like a successful businessman than a farmer in his Sunday clothes. As he walked into the study of Benton's hotel suite, Benton whipped off his half-frame glasses and put a large sheaf of cables on the desk. He shook hands with Jimmy Lee warmly and pointed out a large red leather wing chair.

"Drink, sherry? Something soft?"

"I'd like some ginger ale, if I may."

"Good. Two, Tom," he said crisply to the butler. He looked searchingly into Jimmy Lee's eyes. "You know my magazines?"

"Of course. Every one knows them."

With a small show of irritation Benton said, "I mean do you read 'em?"

"Not often. I'm not a subscriber."

Benton smiled. "You could have fibbed a little to make me feel good."

"It's not my business to fib."

There was a moment of silence and then Benton said, "Where are you going next, Jim? May I call you Jim?"

"Certainly, Mr. Benton. Please do."

Jimmy Lee noticed that Bruce Benton did not tell him to call him Bruce. He felt Bruce Benton's eyes sizing him up, evaluating him. "Tell me about yourself, Jim. This isn't an interview; just two friends talking."

Jimmy Lee took a sip of the ginger ale. "Well, I guess I'm about the luckiest fellow in the world. I mean, I know that I have just average intelligence and by rights I should be a minister in a small church somewhere. May end up there anyway. But today I talked with the President and now I'm closeted with one of the most important men in the country, maybe the world."

Benton waved the praise aside. "Right, you're lucky, we both know that. You are becomingly modest, too. I saw that right off. You have an attractive way about you, Hawkes. I think you have a great future."

Jimmy Lee colored and felt the blush coming to his face strongly. "I won't say I'm not pleased by what you're telling me, sir. I know how important it is to me to have someone like you take an interest in me. Honestly though, I'm trying to make myself work for the greater honor and glory of the Lord. If I can be successful doing His work, then that's success enough for me."

Benton sighed. "Yes, yes. You know my parents were missionaries, both of them, in the Orient."

"Yes, I know."

"I believe in a life of service, of making a contribution to my country, to the world. As a world power we have a great responsibility. You know, as we go so goes the world. There's moral decay setting in, it's everywhere. I'm disturbed by what I see. Protestant ministers and even some priests turning to socialism and Karl Marx in Latin America, France, and elsewhere. These are strange times. We need old fashioned, God-fearing, God-

loving clergymen."

Jimmy Lee smiled, "You sound like one of my sermons."

Benton picked up the sheaf of cables and rifled through it. "I know; here's a report on your Denver campaign." He handed it to Jimmy Lee.

Surprised, Jimmy Lee's eyes moved swiftly down the page. It was a transcript of one of his sermons in Denver. He recalled two photographers working near the speakers' stand. "Were those your cameramen in Denver?"

"Some of the time." Benton nodded.

Jimmy Lee smiled. "I'm glad to hear it."

For the next three hours, during and after dinner, Jimmy Lee received Bruce Benton's interpretation of history, with particular emphasis on the Pax Americana. A good deal of his philosophy had been previously published in his magazines in one form or another, but he made many leading statements which he qualified with, "this is confidential and I will deny having said it if you quote me."

In Benton's view, Senator McCarthy was a bully and a boor and frequently guilty of overkill. "However," he added, "the problem exists. There is a hard core group of Marxists among American intellectuals, academics, students, and in the labor movement. The cancer has to be found and excised. That is what the cold war is all about. There is our way, the democratic way, and their way, the totalitarian way, and it is war."

"You don't suppose," Benton said, "that after squandering all of that blood and treasure, billions of dollars and millions of lives, that we in the West are going to stand around and quietly watch the balance of power fall into the hands of the Communists?"

"No, I supposed that was what the Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance were all about."

"Right," said Benton raising an index finger, "and having strong, active religious groups is important to continue to remind people, particularly young people, that the Protestant ethic, that Christian values and virtues are all important to the world and to the success of American society."

Jimmy Lee smiled and nodded. He had the feeling that Bruce Benton took himself much too seriously to have a sense of humor, but he was light-headed because of the success of the evening. "Mr. Benton, you don't have to convert me. I'm a Christian already."

Benton's mouth remained open, and surprisingly, he smiled. "You are at that. Well, Jimmy, you've passed muster. We're going to go all out for you. Just had to be sure. Couldn't have you turn out to be a cornpone version of Father Coughlan, you know."

He stood up. "Oh, yes, I forgot. Your staff is going to have to expand dramatically now. You are going to need a couple of reliable black co-religionists around you, particularly since you'll be going to Africa fairly soon."

Jimmy Lee was confused for a moment. Benton almost sounded like he was giving him orders. As a matter of fact he had been planning an African trip, but no one, save for Rachel and the religious groups in one or two of the countries he planned to visit knew his thinking about this. Benton continued:

"I've got two fellows in mind for you. Chap named Malcolm Williamson. Very bright, big fellow with a wonderful voice. Sounds a little like Paul Robeson, when he sings. Other fellow's name is Hal Smothers, a good boy, too. Younger. I like the way you've handled yourself

with the coloreds. Enlightened for a Southerner; fair and I think they will feel that way about you." Benton then ended the evening abruptly. "Call me when you come through New York." He turned quickly and walked out of the room.

Jimmy Lee let himself out and pondered the three hour briefing session. It was clear that Benton knew all he wanted to know about him, but he wanted Jimmy Lee to know what the game plan was for all future crusades. Jimmy Lee had a powerful ally and supporter—as long as their interests and goals were the same, but God help him if Benton ever regarded him as a threat or an adversary.

A few days later Malcolm Williamson was in Jimmy Lee's makeshift office at his new Chicago headquarters. "I spoke to Mr. Benton last night, Reverend. He's got a suggestion to make."

"What'd he have to say?"

"Well, he hopes you understand his thinking on this. Says that maybe Africa isn't the place for you to go right now."

Jimmy Lee sat up straight in his chair. This was too much. He knew that to have Bruce Benton as his friend and mentor was perhaps the greatest thing that had happened to him, but he had made his plans. Controlling himself, and with the foreknowledge that the picture story of the Denver campaign would be published the following week in *Picture World*, Jimmy Lee moistened his lips before speaking. "What's he have in mind?"

"Korea."

For a moment Jimmy Lee couldn't speak. Of course, that was a brilliant stroke. Korea, the battlefield conversions, the wounded and dying, men who were about to

meet their Maker. What better place for a preacher to go, to help the tired, the helpless, the wounded to make their last voyage. It would make a brilliant photo story too, have great impact all over the world.

"When can I go?"

Williamson smiled. "I was sure you'd react that way. I think we can get away in a week. Mr. Benton thinks I should go as your aide."

"Good idea. What about Smothers?"

"We lost him. He's been called up. He'll be in the line in six months."

Jimmy Lee mulled over that bit of intelligence. Good Lord, things were moving fast. He could see Bruce Benton sitting in his New York or Washington offices making decisions which affected people all over the world. Certainly he had changed Jimmy Lee's life radically, and from the look of things would continue to exert a strong influence in the future, but something told Jimmy Lee he wouldn't always be happy about it. In some ways this move to send him to Korea had all the aspects of a command decision. He didn't like the feeling of being a puppet on a string. However, there was no denying that it was a great opportunity. It almost seemed like a case of divine intervention.

Jimmy Lee enjoyed three wonderful days at Mint Hill before flying to New York to meet Malcolm Williamson. It was October and the leaves were still on the trees, an ocean of rich yellows, russets, and umbers. It was a time of peace and tranquility for Jimmy Lee, too. His voice was restored to its full strength, and he felt strong and well for the first time in months. There was little doubt that being eternally on the run and living out of a suitcase was

debilitating, but that was the life of an evangelist.

Jimmy Lee and Malcolm were to lunch with Bruce Benton in New York.

"I'm hungry as a bear," Jimmy Lee said.

"Sorry to hear that," replied Williamson. "The old man is a diet nut."

Malcolm Williamson's words were accurate. Lunch consisted of a raw spinach salad, soy curd, collard greens, and fresh figs. Benton motioned his guests to a luncheon table resplendent with cut glass crystal, Moustier ceramic plates, weighted solid silver silverware, and crisp yellow Irish table linen. A uniformed waiter poured sparkling *Aqua Pellegrino*.

"Going to have to watch yourself in Asia," Benton said to both men. "More parasites per square inch than anywhere else in the world. Get the trots every time I go there no matter how careful I am."

Both Jimmy Lee and Malcolm assured him that they intended to take great care while in the Orient.

"Good," said Bruce Benton. "I want you to have maximum exposure there. I've planned to get pictures of you all along the way in Japan, in Seoul, and in the forward areas. We've got a lot of correspondents and photographers out there. We'll have you covered coming and going."

Benton brushed his lips with a napkin, rose, and shook hands. "Got to go. You fellows finish your lunch. I'll see you when you get back"—he looked at his chronometer—"that'll be in about a month."

When Benton left the room Williamson stood up and said, "Let's get a hamburger. I need some meat."

The following morning they emplaned on a Pan

American Constellation which would wing them westward. The flight to Japan and thence to Korea would be a long one with many stops. Williamson gave Jimmy Lee a file on Korea prepared by *Picture World's* editors, and for the next two days he steeped himself in the lore of the Korean conflict.

What he was not prepared for was the chaos and confusion, the death and degradation, of the war. Williamson and Jimmy Lee had been issued officers' uniforms without insignia on their arrival at Kyoto Air Base, so they moved freely among the American troops being shipped to the Korean peninsula.

Surprisingly, one or two young soldiers recognized Jimmy Lee from his newsphoto. They respected him considerably because he was moving up to staging areas, and might go even to the front. Most of them were young, and Jimmy Lee felt they were feeling just the way he did: apprehensive, uncertain, and just plain scared.

On the night Jimmy Lee landed in Korea he spoke before a group of three thousand men waiting at an Infantry Replacement Depot. He spoke simply, unaffectedly, and from the heart. "Protect these men who go into battle, Lord," he said, "and if you must take them, take them swiftly to your peaceful places."

Seeing all of the death and destruction of war had a profoundly disturbing effect on Jimmy Lee. He was taken on a guided tour of several field hospitals where he visited with young men whose bodies were irreparably burnt and crippled. His eyes frequently filled with tears when he left the wards. While he was there he tried, like the medical personnel, to steel himself against the tragedy around him and to project a calm, positive image.

Frequently Jimmy knelt by the beds of wounded

soldiers and prayed with and for them. It was a genuine, sincere action, and it was captured on film for *Picture World* by Gerry Davis, a diminutive elf of a man, constantly moving into different positions to get his picture, who seemed to be everywhere.

The man prayed fervently with Jimmy Lee and brought to mind the expression he had often heard during World War Two: "There are no atheists in fox holes." Later, Williamson told him that Davis was going to join them and they would move up to the front lines with several infantry replacements.

That night, in an U.S. Army Nissen hut, Jimmy Lee prayed for himself and Malcolm Williamson.

He hoped the Lord heard him.

THIRTEEN

It had become a common practice for Rachel to bring the two girls to visit their grandparents at least twice a week, and Sarah Hawkes frequently dropped in unbidden at Rachel and Jimmy Lee's small house.

Little Sarah was in the first grade and the baby, Ruth, would enter kindergarten the following year. Jimmy Lee's wife was increasingly lonely with her husband away so much, and Sarah Hawkes knew it. She was a strong woman though, much like herself, and for this reason Sarah Hawkes knew she would not complain. Her husband was engaged in the Lord's work, and was now risking his life to comfort the boys in Korea.

"Rachel," the older woman said, "you recall Damon's daughter Rena?"

Rachel nodded and said, "Yes, a lovely girl. Jimmy Lee and I ran into her in Chicago."

Sarah Hawkes sniffed. "Well, she looked like a lovely girl, but she turned bad."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Rachel remained unmoved by her mother-in-law's comments and exhibited no great interest in gossip at any time. She made an effort to change the subject, but Sarah would not be deterred.

"She was here in Mint Hill last week—slipped in for a couple of days to visit her father. Just as well his eyes have failed him. I understand she was dressed like a hussy."

"Damon must have been happy to see her after all of this time."

"Yes, but it's just as well he doesn't get around the way he used to, or he'd find out all about her."

"My Lord," said Rachel with a touch of irritation, "what has the poor girl done?"

Sarah Hawkes pursed her lips. "She's a whorehouse madam, that's what she's done."

Rachel was taken aback. "Why, how? That hardly seems possible."

Sarah leaned forward and lowered her voice. "Mona heard all about it from some relative in Louisiana. Seems it was in all of the papers. Some black man was shot in the house last year. She has connections, they say, so nothing happened to her, and the house is still open for business. Or so Mona says."

Rachel raised her eyebrows. "I always thought that Mona liked that girl. She always seemed so proud of her. It's hard to believe she could carry such tales."

"Mona is a Christian and she despises people like that who are corrupted and then corrupt others."

Rachel was silent for a moment. "I suppose that's true, but it's unkind of her to spread the story around. It would hurt old Damon terribly."

"Yes, it would," said Sarah Hawkes. "The old preacher deserves better. I don't think anyone would be mean enough to tell him. Leastaways, I hope not."

Rachel thought for a moment. "This news will be a great disappointment to Jimmy Lee."

"Yes," Sarah Hawkes agreed. "They were great friends as children, but the good example doesn't seem to have worked."

Rena was glad she'd made the trip back to Mint Hill. It had put her mind to rest to see that Damon was comfortably taken care of. Neighbors and members of his church saw that he had his meals regularly and visited him daily. He was well-looked after because he was well-loved. In his case, at least, there was some justice.

It was a shock to discover that he was almost blind. "I make out the lights and shadows," Damon said. "I can get around the house and garden pretty good, but I got to stay out of the woods."

Rena made her visit to Mint Hill a swift one, and stayed only one day, returning as soon as possible to her comfortable apartment above the brothel in Beauregard Square. Only three months before, that sonofabitch ex-husband of hers, Bert White, had caused so much trouble there, when he came sniffing around trying to borrow a thousand dollars. The way things turned out, she would have been better off giving it to him. In the end, it had cost her three thousand dollars to avoid going to court, and Bert had wound up in the hospital with a bullet in his leg.

It was just too bad that Indian John, her bodyguard bouncer, hadn't shot the bastard in the belly after he pulled a knife on him. The whole story hit the newspapers and she had had to close up Wanda's for three weeks until the story blew over. But, she threw the best damned party in Wanda's history the day she reopened. Everyone came: the boys from City Hall, the politicos, lawyers, the gentry, the gamblers. That party lasted three days, and she made a pot of money, too.

She had all the money she needed, every comfort, even luxury in the world, but she was not happy. She needed a man, a real man, not another Bert White. She had him all picked out, but it might be impossible to get him. She had written him a straightforward letter inviting him to visit her in New Orleans and she was waiting for a response. Meeting Lionel Roland in Paris had spoiled things for her. She measured all men by him, and few could pass muster. God, how she wanted to have a fling with Lionel!

Young Damon was going to be a problem in the future, she knew that. A year ago she arranged to re-enroll him in the northern military school. He wanted to go back, he said. He had had some friends there, but lately things had gone wrong for him. He had been disciplined for drinking and the school said that if he were caught again he would be expelled. Fifteen years of age and a drunk! What to do about him? She couldn't have a strapping young stud living with her in the bordello. The only thing was to get him into another school, a good one in the east. Although he was tall and slim like his father, he'd inherited Damon's strength. These attributes served to make him a natural athlete. The football coach at the military academy had anticipated he'd be their star halfback. It

kept him from being expelled once, but another violation and they would have to find a new school for him.

Again and again Jimmy Lee found himself studying the faces of the young men, the soldiers in the various United Nations' commands. So many of them looked like boys, no older than his own illegitimate son. It had been years since he had seen Damon, but he thought of him now, and prayed that the war would not last long enough to claim him as a combatant. It looked to him like the war would go on forever. The North Koreans and the Chinese were fiercely contesting every foot; though the U. N. Command seemed to have an advantage in the skies, the artillery barrages laid down by the Communist forces were a frightening thing to live through.

Jimmy Lee was shelled as he waited on line for a hot meal at a forward area field kitchen.

He stood dumbfounded as the soldiers around him broke and ran for cover, diving into any depression that would serve as a foxhole. Suddenly he felt himself being upended and thrown to the ground. He turned and saw that Williamson was sprawled over him.

"What . . ." he started to speak, but was silenced by an explosion which threw quantities of dirt over both men. He huddled face down on the ground, and then felt himself being pulled to his feet.

"It was a mortar, not one of the big shells," Williamson said. He looked around. "We're lucky no one got nicked."

Gerry Davis walked up to them. "I think I got a great shot of you both on the ground. I'm sure we'll make the magazine with this one."

Davis's observation was prophetic. Before Jimmy Lee

returned home in six weeks, that picture and four or five others appeared in *Picture World*. The photos showing Jimmy Lee praying with the wounded and talking with combat infantrymen created the illusion of a fearless evangelist which genuinely embarrassed him.

Because of all of the death and destruction he witnessed, he experienced a crisis in faith. It was difficult for him to comprehend. First, he knew now for sure, only the spiritual life was of any importance. He'd seen too many bodies that looked like charred chicken carcasses. Life in the human body was sometimes beautiful, but it was all too temporal. Doubts assailed him from every side. So many lives snuffed out. For what? He prayed for instruction, for guidance, for enlightenment.

After stopovers in Japan and India, where he was laid up with dysentery, Jimmy Lee landed at Orly Field outside of Paris.

Walking through the terminal after clearing customs and immigration, Jimmy Lee was surprised to hear his name called by a melodious female voice. "*M'sieu 'Awkes, moment, s'il vous plaîtes, Oi! Jeeeemee!*"

Spinning around, he saw the unforgettable sight of Daolah Houpheet-Boiney trotting toward him, gesticulating wildly. She was wearing a beautiful aqua silk dress and matching turban and, as usual, was the spectacular center of attention of all the hungry-eyed men in the airport.

Jimmy Lee walked toward her and as he extended his hand, she kissed him briefly on the cheek. "*Mais, mon pauvre*, what has happened to you? *Vous êtes presque un cadavre.*"

"I've been quite ill. Caught dysentery in the Orient."

The strikingly beautiful black woman smiled, revealing a magnificent set of white teeth. "Oh yes, I've seen your pictures in *Picture World*. My, you are a celebrity now! Come, I am going to take care of you."

Jimmy Lee protested, but Daolah would hear nothing of it. "You are a sick man and you are going to be taken care of by me whether you like it or not. *C'est fini!*"

Daolah led the way, and they were soon in a taxi headed for the city. She chatted animatedly for a few minutes, directing questions at Jimmy Lee in rapid-fire fashion, until he felt himself fading, a victim of his fatigue. Daolah, quick to recognize his condition, said, "*Basta!* Enough. Rest; we will be home soon and you will be fine."

Grateful to be able to close his eyes Jimmy leaned back in his seat and they rode in silence. He awoke as they were going over a bridge. "Where are we?" he asked.

"Almost there, *cherie*. I live on the *Isle St. Louis*."

With Daolah's assistance in sorting out the French money, Jimmy Lee paid the cab driver and they entered a scabrous looking old building. They entered an ancient lift, barely big enough for the two of them, and it slowly creaked its way up the shaft. Pressed close to the beautiful woman, he was aware of the soft, warm contours of her body.

"*Voila et voici*," Daolah said softly. "Come, we are here."

Five minutes later Jimmy Lee was sitting in a chair by the side of a canopied bed, drinking a cup of warm milk. It was a richly furnished apartment, Jimmy Lee could see, though he was not aware that the furnishings were real antiques, Empire and *Louis Quinze*, Aubusson tapestries and Lalique glass.

Daolah, dressed in a white cotton smock, entered the room. "What?" she said, a note of asperity in her voice, "you are still dressed? I told you to disrobe." She leaned over and started to undo Jimmy Lee's tie.

"*Quelle cravatte,*" she grumbled under her breath. With some hauling and pushing and pulling she had Jimmy Lee stark naked. Folding back the blankets, she indicated he should lie down on the bed.

"Now, just relax," she commanded. "Go to sleep if you wish. Do not fight it. Dream sweet dreams." Then she slowly began to knead his neck and shoulder muscles.

As soon as Daolah started to massage him, Jimmy Lee felt the tension drain out of his body. He let himself float on the exquisite sensation of tight, stiff portions of his anatomy being brought back to a relaxed suppleness. He was in ecstasy and wished she would never stop. She worked slowly and thoroughly, her long, powerful fingers probing and kneading individual muscles in his lower back and arms. Then, she moved to his buttocks and hamstrings, his thighs, calves and feet. She did not miss an inch.

"Over," she commanded.

Refreshed but still drowsy, he did as she said.

He settled back in the bed and she worked on the front of his legs. She touched him lightly and as she caressed his thighs, he became instantly erect. She laughed and touched his penis and scrotum in feathery caresses, and then suddenly stopped, stood up, and took off her white smock. Her body, glistening with sweat, was magnificent to see. Jimmy Lee reached for her and started to get up.

"No, no, no," she said. "*C'est comme ça.*" She swung herself over him, enveloped him from above in a sitting position, and rode him into two quick orgasms, one after

another. She finally left him sleeping blissfully, a contented king who had possessed a generous queen.

He awoke the following morning with a feeling of robust health and well-being.

Daolah came into the room, tentatively at first, but when she saw that he was awake she smiled and said, "Ah, you look recovered. You slept like a baby, as they say."

"Thanks to you, darling girl, but I'm ravenous. I could eat the back end of a barn owl, as they say down home."

"Breakfast is served, *cherie*, only first step to my balcony and have a look at this beautiful city."

Jimmy Lee followed her into a sitting room, out a French door, and onto a fragile looking grated balcony. "There," Daolah pointed, "if you crane your head that way, you can see the flying buttresses of *Notre Dame*."

After breakfast she showed him a copy of *Picture World*.

"Two pages of photographs, Jimmy Lee. *C'est fantastique.*"

Jimmy Lee eagerly examined the pictures which showed him under fire. They were excellent and told the story well.

Daolah pointed to the photo of Jimmy Lee and Williamson sprawled on the ground during the mortar burst. "Who is that black man with you? I think I know him."

Jimmy Lee turned quickly to Daolah. "That's unlikely. He's an aide loaned to me by *Picture World*, who works for the magazine."

"What's his name?" she persisted.

"Malcolm Williamson."

She paused a moment, toying with her hair, then said, "It used to be Bill Metcalfe. He tried to recruit me into the CIA."

"CIA?"

"Oh, you know," Daolah replied. "The Central Intelligence Agency. Your government's espionage agency."

Somehow the news did not surprise him. Williamson was such a knowing, competent, well-rounded, and bright, man. And since arrangements had all been made through Bruce Benton, he must be a part of the scheme, too.

Daolah laughed. "I can see you didn't know. Don't worry; they infiltrate every group one way or another."

Jimmy Lee thought for a moment and asked, "You mean the Fight for Christ Conference in Hermance?"

Daolah nodded.

"They had spies among the delegates? I can't understand why."

"Oh, I guess they think an international group of missionaries is an ideal spot to trade information, to pass it, and to set up contacts with people from a number of countries at once."

Jimmy Lee pondered her explanation. "You said you knew Williamson by another name, that he tried to recruit you into CIA?"

"That's right. He called himself Bill Metcalfe two years ago when he was a labor attaché at the Marshall Plan."

"The Marshall Plan."

"Yes, the headquarters are here in Paris, along with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and various UN offices, so the town is overrun with intelligence and counter-intelligence people."

"But why you?"

"*Mais, pourquoi pas non?*" Flamboyantly, she rose and walked around the room. "Am I not young and beautiful? Do I not have entree to some of the best salons in Paris, despite being *une noire*, perhaps because of it? This city is over-populated by American blacks, many of whom could be radicals, or working for some other government."

"I see," said Jimmy Lee.

"You don't see the half of it," she replied, laughing to herself because she was on the payroll of a secret agency of the French government. "Your people are all over the place. The United States has so much money, they can afford to throw it away on the craziest projects. And your intelligence bureaucracy, they want to grow and grow, to get bigger and bigger."

Jimmy Lee nodded morosely. "Well, I have nothing to hide, and we do need an intelligence service. We are at war. Anything could happen."

"That's true, *cherie*, put it out of your mind. It has no consequence to you, really. It is a fact of life in the second half of the twentieth century, that is all."

"What about your work with the hospitals in your country?"

"Aaah," she sighed, looking sad. "There was a scandal—equipment and supplies stolen. I had to give up. It is so sad; the people need help so badly. Perhaps one day . . ."

"And the Fight for Christ?"

"I do some volunteer work though I am no longer actively connected with the organization."

Jimmy Lee was suddenly taken with the grotesqueness of their situation. Two leaders in a world Christian movement enjoying—reveling even—in adultrous cop-

ulation. He felt a stab of remorse, and said a silent prayer.

Daolah touched his hand. "Jeemee, you look ill. What is it?"

Jimmy Lee passed a hand over his eyes. "I guess you'd call it an attack of Christian conscience. I haven't fallen victim to this sort of thing for a good many years. I actively try to avoid involvements of this . . . sort. I'm sorry, Daolah, I don't mean to sound ungrateful. You're very beautiful, you've been good to me, but I am a minister . . ."

"There, there, Jeemee, unburden yourself. Make your confession and I'll make mine. I, too, have my code and it is that as long as I hurt no one, then I have not sinned. We were first attracted to one another long ago in Switzerland. I have carried that memory of you all this time. I am glad I did. In one way I have been a Good Samaritan to you, in another, an unregenerate Mary Magdalen. For a short time I have made life a little more bearable for you, eased your aches and pains and . . ."

"Troubled my mind," Jimmy Lee added, with a smile. He decided not to discuss sin and temptation with the lady anymore. She was too smart for him and he knew it.

"You will return to the United States soon?"

He nodded. "After a day or so in London. My sickness held me up."

She rose and patted him on the cheek. "Come, it's time for your massage."

Automatically, and without demur, he padded after the nubile princess into the bedroom.

He arrived back at Mint Hill in time for Sarah's eighth birthday party, loaded with souvenirs and gifts for all of his ladies, who agreed that there was only one Jimmy Lee.

That night at supper in his father's home he offered up thanks that the family was together again. His sisters and their husbands, their children and his own, his mother and father, were gathered to celebrate his homecoming. God had allowed fortune to smile on them all and he was eloquent in his thanks. It was a wonderful meal and Jimmy Lee announced that he wanted to go into the kitchen "and thank Mona."

Sarah laughed. "You'll have to thank the new cook, Mavis Walters. Mona showed her everything she knew, though. She's a real good cook."

"Where is Mona?" Jimmy asked. "How is she?"

"Oh," said Sarah, "she's a real old lady now, but she's being taken care of fine by some relatives down Weddington way. If you have time, you should drive out to see her. You were always her favorite."

Jimmy Lee agreed and asked Rachel to accompany him. She demurred, gave him a weak smile and said, "You go without me. I've got too much to do." The old lady wouldn't tell him directly about Rena, but she was sure that Mona would give him the bad news. That was her way.

Mona had aged so he hardly would have known her, though he tried to pretend otherwise. "You look awfully good to me. You've got a beautiful heart and a beautiful soul. That's what important."

The old lady slapped the arm of her rocking chair hard and said, "Don't you go talking about beautiful souls to old Mona. Mona knows all about you, preacher." Her eyes had narrowed and from the look of them, he knew there was no more pretending with his old mammy.

"Why, what do you mean, Mona?"

The old woman threw her hands up in the air. "Away away Satan! You shouldn't have done what you done. That poor gal is nothin' but a whorehouse madam. She's damned for good, damned for good." And she broke into uncontrollable sobs.

Jimmy Lee was stunned. He hugged the old woman in his arms until at last she stopped her weeping. "You shouldn't a done it to her, Jimmy Lee. What's gonna become of that little black bastard of yours? He'll never have a chance. Be just like the rest of us."

Jimmy Lee stayed with the old lady and tried to comfort her. After a half hour she had quieted down and indicated that she wanted to nap. She was asleep when he slipped out of the house and down the walk to the car. He got in and sadly drove away.

Now he wouldn't be able to face Damon ever again. He didn't want to look into his friend's face if Damon knew that Jimmy Lee had betrayed him with Rena.

During the next six months Jimmy Lee drove himself mercilessly to keep the most demanding schedule ever undertaken by any evangelical group. At the conclusion of the domestic tour, which ended with a three-week crusade in Toronto, the team members returned to their homes for a two week rest prior to their most important campaign yet: a crusade to England.

Jimmy Lee received a call from the Washington correspondent of the London *Daily Clarion* asking for an interview. The reporter, Philip Boyle, said he wished to see Jimmy Lee in his own environment. Though Jimmy Lee agreed, he called the Chicago office and spoke to Malcolm Williamson about the interview.

"I know the guy," Williamson said. "I think it's a mistake."

"Why, Mal?" he couldn't afford any mistakes so close to the London campaign.

"The guy feeds on controversy. He'll have you saying things you don't mean."

"Then I want you here, when he comes down at the end of the week. Perhaps you can keep him in line."

"O.K., I'll be down late Thursday. Can you put me up?"

Jimmy Lee laughed. "You know we have more than enough room."

"That wasn't what I meant. That's still Georgia down there."

"Oh, I see what you mean. I had forgotten . . ."

"What? That I'm black."

Jimmy Lee laughed. "Please don't be offended. I think of you as part of me, part of the organization. Color doesn't exist in that frame of reference."

"Reverend, you're going to start converting me if you keep this up."

After Jimmy Lee hung up he told Rachel about their guest. "The more I get to know Malcolm, the more I'm convinced how superior he is, a remarkable person."

Rachel looked at her husband closely. "He's not really one of the group, though, is he?"

"Sure he is."

"What I mean, he's not wholly religiously motivated."

Jimmy Lee thought for a moment. "Yes, you're right, but he is religious in a kind of abstract way. I mean he has such high personal ethical standards that automatically make him a religious person. He was picked for us, as you know, but it has worked out awfully well."

"I'm glad," she said, kissing him softly on the cheek.

"Sweetheart," Jimmy Lee said a moment later, "I'm

going down to see Damon. I heard he's doing poorly. I should have visited long ago."

"Do you want me to go along? I'd love to see him, too."

Jimmy Lee declined gently, saying that this time he preferred to see the old preacher alone.

As he moved down the paths he knew so well, where once he ran wild with Rena, his memories haunted him. Everything was as it was then, except the moss was a trifle heavier on the trees and the undergrowth more overgrown. He was well on his way to becoming an internationally known figure, and little Rena, like her mother before her, was well on her way to self-destruction—and he had a part in the corruption of that individual, there was no way of denying that. That was the reason for this visit. He knew it was a form of penance, no matter how he tried to view it.

He picked his way through the old garden, having trouble finding the stepping stones, and as he approached the house saw that there was a light burning in the kitchen. He went up the steps, opened the door, and saw his old friend sitting at the kitchen table. Jimmy Lee called out a greeting.

Damon was on his feet as soon as he heard Jimmy Lee's voice. "Praise the Lord," Damon called out. "You haven't forgotten the old preacher." He wrung Jimmy Lee's hand like a pump handle. "Sit down, son," the old man ordered. "Sit down, have a cup of tea, and tell me all about yourself."

Jimmy recounted his adventures in Korea, Japan, and other parts of the world, much to the fascination of the old man. As he related his story, Jimmy Lee took stock of Damon, who had failed considerably since their last visit. It wasn't only that he was almost blind now; the man

seemed to have lost his strength, to have become gaunt and crotchety. He must have had Rena late in life, Jimmy Lee reflected, have been more than twice as old as his wife. That never helps a marriage.

"Do you hear from Rena?" Jimmy Lee asked.

"Not as much as I'd like to, but she's always sending me money. She's still in New Orleans, but her boy's in some fancy school in New York. Goin' to college, too. Can't believe it." Tears were welling up in Damon's sightless eyes.

"I'm glad everything is going well for them, Damon."

"Oh, I've got a lot to thank the Lord for," said Damon. "He's been good to me. I'm content. Plenty of friends, plenty of memories . . ." his voice broke off suddenly.

"Damon, I've got to go. I'm going to London in a few days. We're going to have a ten-day campaign in Birmingham Stadium and there's lots of work to do." He cleared his throat. "Look, old friend, you've always been an inspiration to me. I've never said it to you, but I am a minister because of you, more than anyone else. I know that now."

The old man wept. "I'm proud to hear it, son. Proud."

"Sometimes I wonder if it was the right thing for me to have done. I fail, break the very laws I urge everyone else to obey. I ignore the hellfire and turn my back on God's word."

"You're human, son," Damon said quietly. "If you was an angel you'd be flying."

"I want you to know, Damon, that I think of you all the time. You are a shining example to me, and my one regret is that I'm not the man of God you are, that I should be."

"Now, now," said Damon. "You're gonna give this

poor old preacher a swelled head. You pray, read your bible, meditate, do like you've done before for all this time. You'll work out your problems. God will show you the way."

Jimmy Lee hugged Damon to him, then left. He walked silently through the lush grass, over the ancient Cherokee trails, until he left the thicket. He drove home directly. Poor Damon, he thought, if he only knew the money Rena was sending him was made by the sweat of prostitutes. In his heart he knew that the degradation of Rena had come full circle. The minister's daughter and the minister's lover, the mother of the minister's illegitimate son, was engaged in one of the basest activities known: profit by the sale of another human being's body.

But Damon still did not know that Jimmy Lee had fathered a child with Rena, and Jimmy Lee prayed he never would.

FOURTEEN

Malcolm Williamson arrived at Mint Hill the day before Philip Boyle, the British journalist, came to lunch for the extended interview on Jimmy Lee's home ground. He was a brusque Anglo-Irishman who walked as if he were on a parade ground and barked out his words like a British army drill sergeant. Jimmy Lee, recognizing the importance of the journalist, attempted to conceal his chemical dislike for the man. The odd thing about the interview was that Boyle took no notes. When Malcolm Williamson commented on this, the British journalist said, "I have a remarkable memory—one of my only virtues."

Philip Boyle took leave of Jimmy Lee that evening. Three days later the first of his stories on the American evangelist broke in London, and with it a storm of

controversy. Editorial writers from most of the major British newspapers took Jimmy Lee to task for his statements, which, one way or another, had been twisted by Boyle.

In Chicago, the night before they were to fly to London, Malcolm Williamson took him aside. "Jimmy," he said, "on the face of it, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, this could be described as 'our darkest hour.' On the other hand, you've got to look at it this way. It may be bad publicity, and you've riled up everybody, but by God, they all know who you are. I think we'll get crowds right away, if only to throw tomatoes at you. So you've got to be good, you've got to really deliver, and change their minds about you."

In a sense Williamson's analysis offered the only hope for success, and Jimmy Lee was determined to try and make the most of it. He had been referred to as an "Upstart American Clergyman" in a headline. Well, he would show them. He would convey God's message with such honesty and sincerity that they would all recognize the validity of his crusade. Inwardly, he was shaken by the turn of events, by Boyle's outrageously distorted reports, and by the threat of failure. If he was going to succeed, he was certain, he would succeed because the Lord willed it. Now, in retrospect, he thought it was presumptuous of him to try to awaken British Christians to a renewal in their belief in Christ.

Jimmy Lee, Rachel and thirty members of his executive team, evangelists, and singers, landed at Croydon airport outside of London late on a Saturday night, only to discover that they were being picketed at the arrival buildings. The clergymen's committee on hand to greet the Americans swept the group by the

pickets, who were chanting "Go home, Jimmy!" and "God knows we don't need you." It was an inauspicious beginning, but with God's help, the situation might be saved.

Lionel Roland sipped his coffee in a leisurely fashion in the breakfast room of Rena's apartment above the brothel. He had flown to New Orleans a month earlier with some misgivings, but once settled in, he decided that he could put up with New Orleans because of Rena, and because it seemed to be good for his painting. He had already finished two canvasses, and two more were in the works.

Yes, life was better here than he thought it would be, as long as you stayed in the proper *milieu*. One had to avoid the rednecks and the law. As in many other parts of the world money almost made you equal to your oppressors; lots of money made you lots more equal, except when you were trapped in an unforeseen situation. Like the time, two weeks ago, when he was rousted out of a cab by two white policemen, two rustic rednecks who had hated him on sight because they automatically recognized, from his clothes, speech, and manner that he was a foreign, educated, and liberated nigger.

Lionel had dealt with unpleasant policemen before in Paris and Rome, so inwardly seething, he maintained an unflappable exterior, answering their questions quietly and politely, but without cringing.

"You some kind of perfesser?" one cop had asked.

Lionel faked a smile. "Why, in a way, yes."

The other cop, an obese, pink-faced youth said, "Yeah, whadda ya' teach?"

"Painting."

"Haw," said the first cop, "he teaches house painting. He ain't no perfesser."

"Not that kind of painting," demurred Lionel. "I instruct students on how to paint still lifes, portraits, you know . . . pictures."

"No shit," said the fat cop. He handed Lionel back his passport. "You guys are into everything. You'll do anything to avoid honest work."

Rena had been convulsed with laughter when she heard what had happened. "Damnit all, Lionel, I told you if you have any run-ins with the cops, just tell them that you are my cousin from France. Mention that you live here at Wanda's and they'll take care of you. I pay a lot of money all the way up to people in high places and they know that." Lionel had made a mental note to do just that if there ever was a repeat performance.

Now a story in the *New York Times* caught his attention. "Rena, didn't you tell me that your first love was that minister who's been getting so much publicity?"

Rena moved around the breakfast table and peered over his shoulder at the paper. She read the headline out loud: "Reverend Jimmy Lee Hawkes Preaches To Packed Stadium," and a sub-heading, "London Churchmen Hail Greatest Religious Revival In A Century."

She skimmed the copy below and then said, "I guess he's really made it. He has to have something, to bring off one of those revivals in London."

Lionel pulled Rena into his lap and nuzzled her throat. "He had to have something to bring off his arrangement with you."

"No," she shook her head. "That's not so. We were children, thrown together. It wasn't a matter of judgment at any time."

Lionel put down the paper. "Are you going to tell Damon who his daddy is? He's bound to wonder."

Again Rena shook her head no. "No, that's not so. Bert White is listed as his father, and he never sees Bert, so there's no problem."

"But those pictures of him," Lionel protested. "He's *cafe au lait*. You can see he's half-white, his hair and all."

Rena shook her head. "Well, maybe one day, but not right now. There's no telling what might happen. It wouldn't be good for anyone, especially Damon."

The phone rang and Rena walked into the sitting room to answer it. Lionel heard her identify herself as Mrs. White, something she rarely did, so he picked up his ears. When he heard her gasp and cry out, "No." he walked hurriedly to her. Rena motioned him to be quiet and continued talking.

"Thank you for calling me, Coach Saunders. I appreciate it. It was good of you. Yes, I'll let you know if I hear from him," and she hung up. A look of anguish came over her face. "Crazy Damon, he's just like me. He ran away from school with two other boys. They left notes. They're sure they all enlisted."

Lionel comforted her. "Don't worry, he'll be in touch with you. There'll be no problem. He's too young. Everything will be all right. You'll see."

Rena seemed stunned. "No, it won't be all right. I've protected him, sent him to good schools, given him the best of everything. Now he's going to learn what it means to be a negro."

Lionel laughed bitterly. "Don't kid yourself. He knows what it means, but he doesn't know just how bad it can get. He hasn't been on Mars. No matter where you've sent him to school there have been slights, rebukes,

rejections. It's just that it will be worse now."

"He's only seventeen," Rena said, "they can't accept him, can they?"

Lionel knit his brows. "In France he might get away with it because he's so big, looks so much older. I don't know about the States."

Two days later Rena got a late night phone call from her son. He wouldn't reveal where he was, a trace on the call later revealed it had come from the state of Massachusetts. There had been no way for Rena to move Damon. He was adamant and uncooperative. "Listen, Mum, I'm getting my basic training and I'm staying in. That school was getting me down. I'll write, you hear. Don't worry, nothing's gonna happen to your baby boy." And he rang off.

Young Damon was feeling glum when he hung up on his mother. Hell, he had to be; he was making her damned unhappy by running off to the war, but there was just no other way out. Christ, his grades were lousy and even though he was the big star on the football team they were sure to throw him out. In a few months he'd be eighteen and the draft board would get him anyway. It was better this way.

Besides, he and Chuck Seaman were in this mess together. He had run away from school, too. They were buddies on the football team and now were planning to stay together as soldiers. Chuck was the best friend Damon had ever had. They exchanged confidences and levelled with one another about things he thought he would never dream of talking about to another person.

It was Chuck who made him realize that he probably was not Bert White's child, and not legitimate. "These

military schools," Chuck had said, "are loaded with kids from broken homes, kids that are in the way, or unwanted for various reasons. Look at me. My mother's been married three times, and each time she gets ready to dump her husband I go into a new school."

Chuck was stretched out on his cot in the room they shared at school. "You got a story too," he said to Damon. "What do you know about your father?"

"Oh, not much. Pretty much of a sonofabitch, I guess. At least, that's the idea I got. He's a musician. Supposed to have made lot's of loot at one time."

"Is he very black?"

Damon bridled a little. "What do you mean? Of course he's black."

Chuck placated his friend. "Don't get upset with me. I have a point to make. Is he as black as your mother?"

"Yeah, about the same color. They are both darker than me."

"Exactly," Chuck said, snapping upright in the bed. "That's my point, buddy. Don't you see? Two dark people don't have a light-skinned child."

Damon wrinkled his brow as he comprehended the meaning of his friend's words. "Bullshit," he yelled. "That's a lot of bullshit."

"Now, wait a minute," Chuck said quietly. "I'm not trying to hurt your feelings, not trying to make you think bad things about your mother. It's the way things are. Didn't you ever wonder why you were so light and had wavy hair and all?"

"Yeah, now that you mention it, I did when I was much younger."

"What'd they say?"

Damon thought for a moment. "Oh, they said it was a

question of genetics. You know recessive genes and all."

Chuck Seaman laughed. "Recessive genes, huh? That's a laugh. You're half white, buddy. There's no other explanation. You're at least fifty-fifty, maybe more."

Damon shook his head. "Well, I'll be a sonofabitch. I wonder who my dad is?"

Damon often thought about that conversation with Chuck. It didn't make him sad or unhappy in any strong way, but it seemed to gnaw at him in a tiny way, deep inside him. Now that he was convinced he had a white father, there was this strange curiosity about who he was, what he was. Maybe one day he could talk it over with his mother. She was a terrific person, that he knew; whatever the story was, she would always be that.

Lionel was a continuing source of comfort to Rena. He painted while she ran Wanda's with an almost invisible hand and the money just continued to roll in. In the next six months she received three letters from Private Damon White from camps in the United States, and then she started to get V-mail from Japan and Korea, but that came only rarely.

One day, a few months later, Lionel rolled up his paintings and vanished without a goodbye. He left a note, saying "We've been good friends, and you are very dear to me, but I must return to Paris where I am totally liberated. I can't ask you to join me because your income and source of wealth is in New Orleans, and I am just a moderately successful painter. If you want me, want to talk to me, I am at my old apartment. I never gave it up."

She thought that last fact over. He never really planned to stay forever, but then, he never said he would.

She was grateful that he had stayed until the end of the Korean War. He had been a great comfort while the fighting was going on. Now it was over, but God only knew when Damon would be sent home.

Rena sulked. She was still young, she'd kept her face and figure; she was just the slightest bit heavier than she was twenty years ago when Jimmy Lee took her in the thicket. But what good did it do her? She had a big bank account, security. All dressed up and no place to go. So she called Bubba.

"I'm looking," she told Bubba confidentially, "for someone to run the place while I take a trip. Someone reliable, who won't steal me blind, while I take a couple of months off."

"Gotcha," said Bubba. "White or black, guy or gal, pro or amateur?"

"It makes no nevermind," said Rena, "just don't noise it around that I'm going away."

"You know it. I'll call you."

She felt a tremendous relief once she had made the decision. A trip to Europe would do her a world of good. Sitting around like Mother Goose worrying about her goslin would do her no good. Besides, that kid of hers was acting like he was the natural son of Bert White. Now that his balls had dropped and he was sleeping with women, he had no time for his old mother, even though she had been good to him. Just another selfish man, that's what she had to realize.

The campaign in London had proven to be one of the high points of Jimmy Lee's ministry. There was little doubt that all of the malicious stories which had been written about him earlier were now forgotten. He and

Rachel were received at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. When Jimmy Lee's campaign team departed London, most of the London press hailed them as "the greatest spiritual pilgrims of the age." At the airport several hundred people were on hand to wave goodbye, carrying signs which read, "God Bless You Jimmy, You Saved Our Souls," and "Come Back Soon, We Miss You."

Jimmy Lee returned to Mint Hill for a well-earned rest. After a few days he decided to go down to the thicket to see Damon. At Damon's house he found several black women from the neighborhood and a doctor he did not know.

"What's the matter?" Jimmy Lee asked. "Is he going?"

"Yes, he's goin', the preacher's goin' to meet the Lord," several of the women responded in a singsong fashion.

"May I see him?" Jimmy Lee asked.

The doctor nodded. "He's failing fast, Reverend. I'd make it quick."

Jimmy Lee walked into the little bedroom and was shocked by the shrivelled figure he saw in the bed. Sinking to his knees, he grasped one of Damon's hands and looked into his open, but by now, completely sightless, eyes.

"It's Jimmy Lee, Damon. Do you hear me?"

The old man blinked his eyes and, almost imperceptibly nodded his head. Jimmy gripped Damon's hand and felt the old man's hand tighten in his.

"Oh, Lord," Jimmy commenced to pray, "our brother Damon was washed clean in baptism and anointed with the oil of salvation. Grant him his place at the table in

your heavenly kingdom. Comfort us in our sorrow at the death of our brother. Lord, hear our prayer," and he felt Damon's hand slacken, looked at the old man's face, which wore a smile of contentment.

Three days later Damon's funeral was held at the black church he had led for more than thirty years. The little wooden church was banked in flowers. It was the largest funeral ever held in the county.

The Reverend Elijah Johnson conducted the service and at a prearranged time he said, "I now call on a man we all know, a protégé of Brother Daniels, to offer the a eulogy. The Reverend Jimmy Lee Hawkes."

Jimmy Lee walked up to the lectern and faced the assembled mourners. He looked for Rena, but could see no sign of her. "Friends, neighbors, I loved Damon Daniels," Jimmy Lee said quietly, "because he was good and kind and generous even though the world had not used him well. I loved him because, more than any one I know, he patterned his life on the Savior's, lived by His teaching, and observed His commandments," he began. When he concluded, there was not a dry eye in the church. It was his most moving oration ever.

As soon as Jimmy Lee returned to Chicago, he was summoned to a meeting with a man named David Penrose. Jimmy Lee had been reluctant to see him, but when Penrose mentioned Bruce Benton's name, he knew he had no choice. "I think we'd better get down to business," Penrose said rather brusquely. "Your government is going to ask you to work more closely with some of its people than you have in the past."

"Yes sir," Jimmy Lee said obediently.

"Up till now," Penrose said, "it has been convenient

and logical for us to keep you in the dark about what Metcalfe, ah, Williamson has been doing."

Jimmy Lee now knew that they knew he was aware Williamson was a CIA man.

"We are going to ask you to take a more active role, from time to time, on your trips abroad and sometimes in this country."

Jimmy Lee was quiet for a moment. At first he was tempted to accept the order without question and then some inner voice made him ask what he might have to do. He thought of Rachel, and somehow knew that some of the things the "company" would ask of him would violate the confidentiality of his ministry.

"What do I have to do?"

Penrose made a quick brushing motion with his right hand. "Nothing at all, really. We'll wire you up with a microphone and a tape recorder when you speak to certain people. There's no cloak and dagger stuff to it."

"I'm glad to hear that," Jimmy Lee said.

"We're very interested in Dwight Nearing," Penrose said suddenly.

Jimmy Lee was taken aback. "My God, he's one of our board members. He was one of my earliest supporters. He's practically given us our building. He's a wonderful, God-fearing man."

Penrose said nothing, but took out a black leather pouch from which he filled a curved briar pipe. Carefully packing the bowl, he said, "We know how good he's been to you, Reverend, but things are not always as they seem. Look over on that end table, yes, that one. You'll find the new edition of *Picture World*. Turn to page twenty-eight."

Jimmy Lee rifled through the pages and discovered a

full-page photo of himself giving the eulogy at Damon's funeral. The caption read "Jimmy Lee Buries an Old Friend." Jimmy Lee looked at Penrose, not quite understanding what the man was driving at. It seemed to Jimmy Lee that those ice blue eyes were staring at him with undisguised hatred.

"He was a fine man," Jimmy Lee said quietly.

"Too bad his daughter wasn't there," said Penrose softly.

Jimmy Lee shot a glance at Penrose who was relighting his pipe.

"Also," added Penrose, "his grandson." He looked at Jimmy Lee and seemed to smile knowingly.

"Are you interested in knowing where Rena is?" Penrose asked him.

"Why, yes. No one at the funeral seemed to know."

"She's in Paris for a while."

Jimmy Lee was sweating profusely. His chest felt heavy, and he seemed to be wearing a tight cap on his head. "What about . . . ?"

"Your son," Penrose added.

"Y . . . yes." Jimmy Lee bowed his head.

"He's in an army prison in Japan. Nothing serious. A.W.O.L. He'll be out in a few days. He'll get an honorable discharge too, saw some fighting, and racked up a good record."

"You . . . you know everything about me," Jimmy Lee said haltingly.

Penrose nodded. "Have to. You're working closely with our people, and you're going to be working for us. Don't worry about it. It's top security, and practically no one has access to your file. We believe in you. You're one of us. You were an anti-communist long before we be-

came interested in you. Because you've traveled, you have some insight into these things; you saw Korea, know what it was. Well, the cold war is being fought with the same vengeance. Now, will you agree to this business with Nearing?"

Jimmy Lee was stunned by the turn of events. He felt as though he had aged a hundred years since entering the room. "Regretfully, I will," he said.

Penrose eyed him coldly. "Don't feel that way about it. You are doing your duty to your country. You know who Nearing is, don't you?"

"I know he is a wealthy real estate man."

Penrose smiled. "He is the nephew of Clive Chatfield, the millionaire Marxist, the international businessman. We think he may be his bag man."

"His what?"

"Like Williamson. We think he carries the money and pays off people. Only for the other side."

A few days later, sitting in his office with Malcolm Williamson, Jimmy Lee abruptly slapped a big hand on his desk and said, "Mal, I don't like your boss, Penrose."

Williamson smiled and nodded in agreement. "Not many people do, not even his wife. He's a tough, unprincipled son of . . . uh man."

"You've known him some time?"

"He recruited me at Michigan."

"You know about his plans for me?"

Williamson nodded. "Got to show you how to wire up, make sure everything works."

"A minister shouldn't be asked to spy on his friends and associates, to tape their conversations."

Williamson stood up. "Come on now. We've gone over

this before. You have your integrity. You told me you were convinced it was your obligation to serve your government. Hell, you are a patriot. You are doing this for your country. It is an undeclared war. Besides, you really believe in what you're doing. You're not getting rich at it, not building a shrine to yourself. As long as you keep your eye on the ball, and work at what you believe in, I think you'll be all right. I'm not going to give you a big build up, but I like working for you."

"Thank you, Mal," Jimmy Lee said in a quiet voice. It was good to know someone liked him because he didn't much like himself anymore.

The hard work and dedication of Harold Pink, Austin MacIntosh and Jimmy Lee worked wonders for the Holy Struggle. Crusades in major cities all over the world were booked three years in advance. Weekly radio shows were now taped in their own modern recording studios. And arrangements had recently been concluded to prepare a series of taped television specials. The Holy Struggle and Jimmy Lee Hawkes had become American religious institutions.

The seasons passed, and with them the years. Jimmy Lee's father died and his mother became less active at the farm. His daughters grew, and his love for Rachel deepened, yet Rena was never far from his dreams.

FIFTEEN

Private Damon Daniels White, 1240339, stepped off the military air transport and walked toward the reception area. His uniform was clean and unrumpled even though he'd slept in it all the way from Hawaii. He walked with the easy swinging gait of an athlete, with just the slight hint of a swagger. He looked every inch a soldier. The combat rifleman's badge gleamed on his chest and among the theater ribbons there was a purple heart with a cluster, souvenirs of some tense moments of fighting on a nameless hill in Korea.

If things went the way he wanted them to he'd be out of his monkey suit in no time at all. Two things he had to do first, though. Call his mom, and call poor old Seaman's mom. He wanted to talk to Rena. He'd become a hard case

in the short time he'd been away. He still loved Rena; but he was a man now and he was going to do what he wanted to, when he wanted to.

Damon got a handful of quarters and walked to a coin phone immediately inside the reception area. He dialed the long distance operator and gave her Rena's number in New Orleans. A woman answered.

"Hello," said Damon. "I'd like to speak to Mrs. White."

"Who is this calling please?"

"Her son."

There was a silence. "The one in the army?"

Damon laughed. "Yeah, that's right. I'm the only one."

"Ooooh, Damon, I'm sorry. It is Damon, isn't it?"

"You got it right. Nothing's wrong, is it?"

"No, no everything's fine, but your mother is in Europe. I'm her friend, Clara Moo."

"When is she due back?"

There was a pause. "I'm not certain. Three or four weeks, maybe more. Her plans were open-ended."

Damon laughed. "So are mine. You tell her I called. I'll call back in a couple weeks. No, no I'm fine, thanks. Thanks very much."

Then he had the operator get him Chuck Seaman's telephone number in Pittsburgh. This call wouldn't be so easy.

In less than a week Damon was comfortably installed in an apartment at the rear of a Victorian house in an area of San Francisco known as Cow Hollow. Damon congratulated himself on his good fortune. He had literally stumbled into a terrific deal. He had been trying

to find a marine he knew who lived in North Beach, but instead had run into Pete Carbone, his friend's older brother.

Life in San Francisco was good for Damon. He had a substantial amount of accumulated pay and poker winnings, and he felt that while the money held out he might as well enjoy himself. Through Pete Carbone he met a number of Al's friends and lived rent-free in Al's apartment.

That first week Damon met and slept with a half dozen lovely looking girls. One of them, a tall, high-breasted blonde, moved in with him because she said "he deserved a political education." Her name was Ursula Baum, and although she was only nineteen she had graduated from Berkeley. Damon became her student in sex and political science and was swiftly and smoothly debauched into Marxism and advanced love play.

He had never met anyone like Ursula. She was like a Viking maiden, a Teutonic bride of Wotan. A high noble brow, a perfect profile, rich full lips, flawless skin, and deep, penetrating, blue eyes. She wore her long hair in a chignon, which when unloosed cascaded to her waist. Her torso, arms, legs, buttocks these were as though chiselled in stone. She was firm, smooth, and strong, and possessed a strange musk which Damon found enticing.

Early in their relationship she complained about Damon's drinking and urged that he switch to marijuana, hash, or even amphetamines. "In the long run," she said, "it will do you far less damage than alcohol. You are ruining your liver."

Damon was amiable. He was hung up on the lady for the moment, so why not go along with her wishes? It was all the same to him as long as they could get high

together. He telephoned his mother from time to time, but Clara Moo hadn't heard from Rena for several weeks. She urged him to write or cable her in Paris.

"No," he said, "I don't want to spoil her good time. I'll see her soon as she gets back." And he gave Clara Moo his telephone number in San Francisco.

One night, when Ursula and Damon passed a new cafe specializing in jazz combos, a sign caught Damon's eye. "Bert White and his Bantu Bopsters." He took Ursula by the arm and walked into the crowded cafe. They moved toward the bar and Damon motioned the bartender toward him. "How do I get a message to Bert White?"

The bartender held up his hands. "That's easy. After his set, just go over and talk to him. He's playing now."

Damon looked up at the stage at the end of the room. A paunchy black man was slouched on a high stool playing a clarinet solo into a microphone. He was good, Damon thought. As good as Benny Goodman, at least on this number.

The combo, a bass, trumpet, drums, piano, and Bert's clarinet played for another fifteen minutes. When the set was over Damon pushed his way through the crowd and moved up to Bert White as he prepared to walk off the stand.

"Bert White?" asked Damon.

"S'me. What can I do for you?"

Damon extended his hand. "I'm Damon White. Can I buy you a drink?"

White drew back a little and ignored Damon's outstretched hand. "What do you want with me?"

"I always heard you were my father."

White chuckled. "You did, 'eh? Well, in your case you

heard wrong."

Even in the dim light Bert White noticed a flicker of hatred in Damon's eyes. He moved back a step. "Now wait a minute, kid. Take it easy. I'm not your old man. That's all there is to it."

"Let's sit down and talk it over." He motioned White to a table against the wall. "I'll get my girl."

"Nothin' to talk about, kid," White called after him.

Damon brought Ursula back to the table and introduced her to White, who jumped to his feet and bowed. "Say," he said, "you got lots of class, kid. I wish you *were* my kid." He had a dirty laugh.

An hour later Ursula and Damon left the cafe with Bert's story. "So, now you know," Ursula said to him. "You are a bastard. So what? Are you going to let bourgeois concepts of respectability bother you?"

"No," said Damon. "I'm surprised that he is such an absolute shit. Can't see what my mom saw in him. Christ, he really enjoyed telling me I was a white preacher's bastard."

"He didn't know for sure."

"I guess I'll have to ask my mother."

Ursula laughed. "Why should she tell you the truth?"

"You got a point, but you don't know Rena. She's one hell of a woman, even White admitted that."

Ursula nodded. "She sure scared his ass. He doesn't want anything to do with that lady ever in his life."

Just for the sheer hell of it Rena took a double room at the Hotel Meurice. It did her a world of good having all of those well-tailored Swiss bowing and scraping to her. Besides, she liked the fresh cut flowers they put in her room every morning. More than anything she wanted to

telephone Lionel and casually mention that she was in town. She couldn't wait for his response.

However, one of the first things she had to do was shop for some gorgeous clothes so she could dazzle Lionel on his home ground. That meant having some fittings at the house of Pierre Balmain which had always succeeded in making her look spectacular in the past.

For two days she tortured herself. She would not allow herself to call Lionel until she had a smashing new wardrobe. Then, after acquiring about eleven thousand dollars worth of clothes, she dressed in one of the most stunning outfits and took a cab to *134 bis Rue de L'Université*. A moment later she was standing at the door. She turned the bell, and heard Lionel call out. She replied, "*C'est moi, chou-chou,*" and snickered.

The door opened slowly, tentatively. It was Lionel. His eyes grew wide with amazement. "Rena," he gasped. "You should have called."

She gave him a wet kiss on the mouth and walked by him into the room. Sitting at a table near a window overlooking the street, having a quiet cup of coffee, was a magnificent-looking black woman wearing Lionel's silk foulard robe—the one she'd bought him in New Orleans.

Rena made a quick decision. She was going to keep her composure. It served her right. She had barged right in without regard to who was there. She sat down on a sofa and said, "All right, lover, aren't you going to give me a cup of coffee, or maybe a drink?"

Relieved that Rena was carrying things off so well, Lionel moved swiftly to the sideboard and poured some Southern Comfort over ice and handed it to her. "But of course, please forgive me," he said. "Rena, may I present Princess Daolah? Madame White from New Orleans,

Mademoiselle Houpert-Boiney from the Senegal."

Daolah raised her coffee cup in a salute to Rena. "You're even lovelier than Lionel said," she said admiringly.

"Thank you," said Rena. "I work at it, but you look gorgeous in that man's robe that's just flung around you."

Daolah stood up to her full six feet, drew the silk robe around her to more daringly reveal her curves and said, "I really must go now. I'll get dressed and be out of here in a minute. You two must have a lot to talk about."

"Yes," said Lionel in weak voice. "I'm sure we do."

"Please," said Rena, "don't rush on my account."

The women gave feline-like purrs to one another as Daolah walked into Lionel's bedroom.

For want of anything better to say Lionel said, "My condolences, Rena darling, on your father's death."

She gave him a blank look.

He became silent and quickly realized that she did not know that Damon was dead.

"What did you say?" she asked him stridently.

He got up and shuffled through a pile of newspapers, picked up a magazine, walked over and handed it to her. "It's in *Picture World*; there's a picture of that evangelist at your father's funeral."

Rena grabbed the magazine, which was folded back to the page in question. It was a picture of Jimmy Lee at the lectern in the Happy Valley church. Through her tears she read her father's name and part of Jimmy Lee's eulogy to him. It was true. Poor, dear sweet old man.

"What's the date of this magazine?" she asked. "The tenth, that's the day I left on the boat. I guess they couldn't reach me."

"I'm sorry it came as a shock to you, *cherie*."

"No, Lionel," she replied. "I knew he wasn't well. I had to stay away from him, keep his grandson from him. It's too bad. Say goodbye to princess *whats-her-name* for me. I'll be at the Meurice for a few days. Call me if you wish."

"But of course. This evening, if you like."

"No. I'd only brood on you. Tomorrow."

The following day Rena tried to distract herself by shopping at many of the celebrated stores on *Rue Ste. Honoré*. She purchased several buttery-soft handbags at *Hermès*, and while there ran into Freddie, the smartly-dressed former manager of *Chez Carroll* where Rena had once been a singer. "*Et alors*, you look fantastic. You haven't aged a bit."

The two women walked around the corner to the *Ritz* to have an *apéritif*. Georges, the perennial head barman, was on hand and gave the ladies warm greetings.

Rena and Freddie talked over old times at *Carroll's* and ultimately got around to men. "That old Turk, that Aladdin, he never got over you," Freddie said. "He's still around, why don't you give him a ring? Go to lunch or something with the old guy. He really is a fairly decent fellow."

"Perhaps I will. By the way," Rena added in an offhand manner, "I ran into Lionel Roland, the painter, with his new girl. She's something."

Freddie looked at her quietly. "You mean the black one, the very tall one, with the hyphenated name."

"That's right. She's the one."

"Yes, she's something, all right, but she's not his girl. His girl is married. She's a French movie star and she's white."

"But—" protested Rena.

"But nothing. Everyone says they do sleep together even though she's his sister and an agent."

"Wha . . . what?"

"Well, she's at least his half-sister."

"But he's supposed to be Haitian. Everyone knows that."

"*Oui*, and I'm supposed to be a natural blond. Everyone knows that."

Rena was really angry now. Lionel had wanted her to think that his sister was his mistress to throw her off the track of his real romantic interest, the film star.

"What's her name? The film star?"

Freddie bit her lower lip. "Let's see, yes, it's Micheline Corday. Really quite lovely."

"You say she—the sister—is an agent. You mean a spy? For who?"

Freddie nodded her head and pursed her lips. "Almost certainly for the D.S.T., French counter-intelligence."

"How about him?"

"I think not, but of course, everything he knows he tells to her. Why, what's the matter, *cherie*? You in that business, too?"

"No, no, that's not it, but he stayed with me in the U.S. for almost a year."

Freddie threw up her hands. "*Merde, alors*, everything you are is on file with the *Sureté*. You can be sure of that. So," she finished her drink, "*morte aux vaches*."

The following day Rena accepted Lionel's invitation for dinner. They made a striking couple on entering Laperouse. Rena was well into her entrée when she said, "Tell me, Lionel, this thing with your sister. You don't

really sleep with her, do you?"

Lionel brushed his mouth with a napkin to give himself time to think. "No," he said with dignity. "We gave it a go once when we were children, but we are both too discriminating for that sort of thing now."

"What about this flirtation you are having with Madame Corday?" Rena spoke coolly, almost dispassionately, but there was bite in her choice of words.

"My, my," said Lionel. "You certainly got an earful, didn't you?"

"I did. It's all true, isn't it?"

Lionel nodded silently and then said, "We had no agreement, no vows. It was all over when I left New Orleans."

"Yes," she said, "but you used to give me all that bullshit about me going with white men, and now here you are in the sack with a married white woman."

Lionel shrugged. "What can I tell you? I'm in love."

Rena's face softened. "Lionel, I wish you well. You are a really terrific man. Take your happiness where you can find it. If you were at loose ends I'd try to drag you back to New Orleans."

"I wouldn't mind," he said with a smile. "Only you really are a *commercant*, a business woman. You are good at running things. You like running that bordello. Get into something legitimate and you'll be a success. I'm really only an artist, and not a particularly good one."

Rena hadn't thought it possible, but the evening turned out to be delightful and ended on an extremely positive note. Rena wanted to buy a couple of Lionel's paintings and he insisted on giving her one as a memento.

"You know, Rena, it really is a small world. You know, my sister and you have something in common."

"Really, I can't think what it is. Does she get dressed by Balmain?"

"No, no nothing so prosaic."

"Well, I give up. What is it?"

"The Reverend Jimmy. She was sweet on him. By God, he must have something, that minister."

"I haven't seen him in years," she said, "but now that he's a celebrity he'd better be careful."

"Daolah says he has a moral battle with himself over whether he will or whether he won't, but he always loses."

"In a crazy kind of way, I think he's sincere. I don't think he plans it that way."

Damon was enrolled at Berkeley as an overage freshman. Through Ursula he met a man named Bruno Goralski who claimed to be a Pole, a naturalized Canadian citizen and a resident alien. Goralski was a Marxist and said he had been a professional terrorist.

He was short, about thirty-five, barrel-chested, bandy-legged and looked like an olympic weight lifter. Even his face seemed to be a mound of sinews and muscle. He was gap-toothed, but otherwise had a pleasant, open face, and did well with the ladies, with whom he had indefatigable relationships. Goralski's main weakness was drugs and he introduced Damon to nareotic mushrooms, Jivaro juice and LSD.

After one of these binges, Goralski asked, "What happened to Ursula? I haven't seen her for a couple of weeks."

"We had a fight and she split."

"That's all?"

"Well, we had a big argument about you. She thinks

you're a phony. What'd she call you? 'An agent provocateur'?"

High as he was, Goralski rolled from his recumbent position, sat up on the couch and barked one word, "Cunt!" He got up and strode excitedly across the room. "Where is she? I'll kill the bitch."

Damon laughed. "You can't. She's really gone for good."

Goralski swore and shook his head. "Shit, why didn't you tell me about her?"

Damon scratched his belly, stretched, and got out of the chair. "Use your head, man. She was my chick, my mentor, and I knew her a lot longer than I know you. What are you worried about? It's not true, is it?"

Goralski frowned. "Got to straighten out and lay off the junk."

"That's right," Damon said, "Ursula found your stash with all those different passports, licenses and social security cards. You must be into a lot of different things."

"I'm sorry she saw that stuff. She's bound to make trouble for me."

"I don't think so," responded Damon. "If you are what you say you are, I don't think anything will happen."

"Thanks very much," Goralski snapped at him sarcastically. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means," said Damon matter-of-factly, "that if you aren't a fink, or a plant for the FBI or the CIA, then you've got nothing to worry about."

Goralski nodded silently, lay back on the couch, closed his eyes and was snoring in a matter of moments.

The following morning Goralski was up and packed when Damon got out of bed. Damon yawned and rubbed his eyes. "What are you doin', man? Did I scare you by telling you what Ursula said?"

Goralski was quiet for a moment. "Let's go have some coffee and a bagel. I want to talk to you."

"Sounds good. Let me throw some water on my face."

Fifteen minutes later the two men were devouring poppy seed and onion bagels washed down with strong Colombian coffee.

"What you're telling me," Damon said, "is that you are a kind of double agent, except that you are screwing both sides because you're really an anarchist. Sheeeit man, you are crazy. If they find out, both sides will be after your balls."

"I know it," Goralski said slowly. "I think the FBI is throwing me to the wolves right now. They owe me a lot of money for past work and now they're refusing to pay me. I think they've tried to set me up to be knocked off by the radical left."

"Why are you telling me all this?" Damon took a sip of his coffee and stared hard at Goralski.

"I don't know. I suppose because I need some one to watch for mail and do some other favors. You know the way I read you, you aren't a white-hot activist. I mean, maybe some time you could be, but right now you're kind of an academic, a theoretical Marxist. You're not really dedicated the way Ursula was."

Damon laughed. "I had to pull that Commie act to keep gettin' in her pants."

"Right, and am I correct about the extent of your involvement in Marxism?"

Damon shook his head in the negative. "Not quite. It's

more then that. It's been a slow, deliberate process with me."

Damon added, "Of course, I could be wrong, but I don't intend to do anything about you being a double agent. Hell, I don't rightly know who to go to with the information anyway, and I have never been a good fink."

"Like me?" Goralski inquired.

"Like you," Damon said with finality. "I'm making you no promises, but I'll hold or forward mail and take your messages if you want. I sort of feel sorry for you, Goralski, and if what you say is true I'd think of getting my ass back to Canada. *You are in trouble.*"

In the next three weeks two heavy letters arrived at Damon's apartment for Goralski, and he forwarded them to a box number in Redwood City. There were also two or three phone calls, but the callers had hung up peremptorily when told that Goralski was not available. They left no messages.

Goralski called a month to the day after he had taken off. "Any calls?" That was all he said. He seemed to be breathing heavily into the phone.

"Three different guys called. All different voices. They wouldn't leave their names or anything. No messages, but I did forward two fat letters to the box number."

"Right. I got 'em. Say, Damon, remember when you and Ursula told me that you thought that the evangelist, Jimmy Lee Hawkes, might be your father?"

"How'd you remember that? I don't remember discussing that with you?"

"We got loaded together one night. You spilled your

guts about it."

"So?"

"So," said Goralski, "you've done me a favor, I'll do you one. He is your old man. No doubt about that. Also, I'm sure he's wired-in to the CIA."

Damon was stunned. "What the hell could he do for the CIA?"

"Think about it," Goralski said. "He travels all over the world, sees government leaders everywhere. It's a great cover. Nothing new about it. A lot of ministers are agents."

Damon hung up, cursing softly to himself. After talking to a guy like Goralski you could believe that one half of the people in the United States were spying on the other half. Still, there was little doubt that Goralski was mixed up in some really sinister activities.

A week later Damon was stunned to see a picture of Goralski on the front page of one of the *San Francisco* newspapers. Though the caption said *Thomas Lewin*, it was clearly Goralski. The headline read, "Informer Sues FBI." The brief story indicated that Thomas Lewin, formerly of British Columbia, had been a paid informer of the FBI for a period of six years with a salary of two thousand dollars a month. Lewin, the story said, "was suing the FBI for \$53,000 in back wages and unpaid expenses." He was also demanding that the FBI relocate him and give him a new identity. The suit had been filed in a federal court in Los Angeles.

Damon put the paper down. So much of what Goralski/Lewin had told him was now falling into place that it must also be true that he was the evangelist's bastard. Recently, when he had seen pictures of Hawkes in the paper he had studied them carefully, and it seemed

to him he bore a strong family resemblance to the preacher. The eyes, nose and forehead, especially, looked alike. It was his mother's business, he knew that. She was a really good, hard working lady, even though she had a fieldhand's knowledge of politics.

That hard-working lady was spoiling him rotten by sending him a fat allowance so he could finish school. He loved Rena, admired her deeply, but he harbored a small vein of resentment against her because of her having allowed his father to be a redneck minister. What could be worse? He didn't like the idea of his old lady giving herself to a white man—any white man—no matter what the circumstances.

For two or three semesters Damon managed to fake his way through Berkeley with, what appeared to other students, remarkable ease. He managed to maintain a B average with an absolute minimum of work and one of the worst attendance records in the school. Ultimately, his cavalier attitude was his undoing. He discovered that he had worn the "wounded veteran" con thin with a usually sympathetic faculty, and now was being forced to hand in his themes on time and to attend classes. When he did not comply he was dropped from the university at the end of the semester and was told not to apply for readmission for a calendar year.

Damon had always prided himself on his ability to not exceed his self-imposed limits in alcohol, marijuana, or what he regarded as soft drugs, the amphetamines. He had often come close to overdoing it, but some inner voice always helped set limits on his intake. Now he lost his inner voice, and he became a deeply disturbed young man; hurt, angry, and sick.

He missed Ursula and was angry with her for not

responding to his letters. He was angry with his mother because she'd shagged with a redneck evangelist who had sired him. He was angry with the Reverend Jimmy Lee Hawkes because he couldn't stand to hear him prating all those goddamned lies over the radio and television and because he was his father. He was angry with the system, with the university, with the whole goddamned business, and life became an out-of-focus nightmare as he began to rely on daily injections of amphetamines which he gave himself with his own syringe.

Several times recently, when he was high on the amphetamines, he had known what he had to do, what action he had to take in order to straighten things out.

He had to have a long talk with that redneck evangelist, had to shake that big ofay up.

SIXTEEN

As far as Jimmy Lee knew, nothing had come of his secretly taping Dwight Nearing a dozen times over the past few months. If the man was engaged in some disloyal activity it was not evidenced by anything he ever said to Jimmy Lee. According to Malcolm Williamson, the company pieced together everything they could on anyone who was suspected of disloyalty and then drew up a complete file. He reassured Jimmy Lee that it was fairly routine.

Jimmy Lee was convinced that Malcolm Williamson was his friend first, and his government associate second. For this reason Jimmy Lee had made him his confidant. Also, when Rena had called him years before to warn him about Daolah, he decided to tell Williamson about the

Senegalese beauty as well. It was a difficult thing for him to do, but he managed to get through it.

"So, she's the one who put the finger on me?" Williamson observed. "I always wondered about that. Why are you telling me now?"

"I found out she was with the DST."

"I could have told you that."

"I didn't trust you then."

"In that connection, I have that report you asked for regarding Mrs. Bert White." Williamson handed him a file folder. "I think she's in good shape," he nodded his head, "but that kid is plenty wild."

Jimmy Lee read the file as soon as he was alone.

"Subject: Mrs. Bert White, known as Mrs. Rena White, now resides in a parish outside the city limits of New Orleans. She maintains her apartment at the Beau-regard Square brothel known as Wanda's, but is reputed to have phased out her direct activities with that venture, having sold a three-quarter interest to a Chinese-American, Clara Moo.

"Subject is now heavily invested in a chain of laundromats, gasoline service stations, and owns at least four large movie houses in the New Orleans area. She is also reputed to have financed a newspaper, *The Daily Blade*, which is directed at the black community. Her attorneys are the prestigious white law firm of Antrobus, Thurmond and Wheeler, and she is the joint owner of a small cattle ranch."

My God, Jimmy thought, how does she do it? She's a wealthy woman.

He went back to the report. "Subject now keeping company with a Greek-American named Gustave Agnos, formerly of Chios, Greece. Agnos is a widower, forty-

three years of age, and successful in the export-import business. Their relationship is maintained at a very low profile, but it is reported to be a serious and lasting one. They are never seen publicly together, but our information is that Agnos has asked Mrs. White to marry him. Till now she has refused.

"Subject's son: Damon White, twenty-three, was a student at the University of California at Berkeley, now unemployed. A veteran of the Korean War, he was court-martialed twice, once for going AWOL, the second time for striking a non-commissioned officer. Nevertheless he received an honorable discharge. While at Berkeley he was arrested for possession of a ounce of hashish, but because it was a first offense he was put on probation for six months. He has no visible means of support, but lives moderately well in Berkeley. He visits his mother in New Orleans from time to time, where it is known she has set up a bank account in his name.

"White was recently arrested in a San Francisco barroom brawl . . ."

I suppose it could be worse, Jimmy Lee thought. He hasn't killed anyone . . . yet.

The next day Jimmy Lee had occasion to talk with Malcolm Williamson. "What do you think of the report?"

Williamson laughed. "I wouldn't believe it unless I knew the outfit that prepared it. It's fantastic, unbelievable . . . a real American success story. A little black girl starts with nothing and now she's a captain of industry. Makes me wonder what I've been doing with my life."

"Oh, come on now. You aren't interested in money."

Williamson shook his head. "Wait a minute, don't be too sure of that."

"What do you think I should do?" Jimmy asked.

"What you've been doing for the past few years."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing, but lie low and stay away from that crazy kid. Rena obviously doesn't wish you any harm, but if the kid ever found out . . ."

"I know," Jimmy Lee said.

On one of his now frequent trips to Africa Jimmy Lee became very ill, and had to cancel several speaking engagements. His early symptoms were a painfully distended lower abdomen. At first he was sure it was another one of his gas attacks and put up with the discomfort. Later, however, it became so painful that he put himself in the Nairobi General Hospital for observation.

After a week of testing a British doctor diagnosed his problem. "Very strange," Doctor Honey said, squinting at Jimmy Lee. "Your belly swelled because of a hepatic vein occlusion caused by senecio-bush tea."

"Tea?" Jimmy Lee asked incredulously. "Why, I have tea every day. I carry my own tea with me."

"Then someone must be tampering with it. We have one of the best laboratories in Africa. I'm sure it's not anything else."

"Another thing," Jimmy Lee complained, "I've been getting a stiff neck lately. It really bothers me."

Doctor Honey pulled at his black moustache. "Better have more tests," he said.

The following morning he appeared in Jimmy Lee's room with two assistants. "I couldn't believe what I found, but you've had an attack of cervical spondylosis."

"Oh my God," said Jimmy Lee.

"Not to worry," said Doctor Honey quickly. "It causes discomfort but it is easily corrected. I've talked with your aide and Mr. Williamson agrees that you should leave immediately for a really good clinic in Europe. They'll have you right as rain in no time."

Three hours later Jimmy Lee weakly made his way to a cab which drove him and Malcolm Williamson to the airport. Malcolm was tense and appeared to be constantly looking out of the cab windows to see if they were being followed. When Jimmy Lee asked about his obvious concern Malcolm replied, "I'm just being careful. But there's no doubt about it you were being slowly poisoned."

"You mean the neck and the belly?"

"That's what I mean."

"But surely . . ." Jimmy Lee started to say.

Malcolm patted him on the knee. "If they wanted to take you out permanently, they could have at any time, with a lethal dose. No, they didn't feel it was necessary. It's a warning to not come back. To get out, and that's what we're doing."

"But I've been received by the president; I prayed with his cabinet ministers."

"And taped them on your hidden microphones."

Jimmy Lee fell silent.

"Don't worry about it. I'm sure it wasn't you. The guys we have on the payroll have acted rather strangely this trip. I think they know that I—that we—operate as bag men."

"Does that mean they've broken our cover?"

Williamson laughed. "No, not completely. They may have broken my cover, but you never gave anyone

anything, except a bible. Come on. Let's move, or we'll miss our plane."

Six hours later Jimmy Lee was installed in a comfortable room at the American Hospital at Neuilly. He was discharged in three days and took pains, while in Paris, to avoid the Ile Saint Louis, or any other places frequented by Princess Daolah.

The flight from Paris to New York was pleasant and uneventful, moreso because the plane was half empty.

"Where," Jimmy Lee asked Malcolm, "do you think they tampered with my tea and fed me fluorine?"

Williamson looked thoughtful. "We were a lot of places. I'd say either Leopoldville or Elizabethville, maybe even Brazzaville. As a matter of fact one outfit may have fed you the Senecio tea and another group could have gotten to you in another place. I think you were given the fluorine in the Nairobi hospital. So did Dr. Honey. That's why he got you out of there so fast."

Jimmy Lee threw up his hands. "But why me?"

Williamson crooked his mouth in an expression of disbelief. "Jimmy, whether you like it or not, you are an active member of the company. Your operation serves as a conduit for funds to all sorts of operations in these places. We are bag men on an international scale, and frequently there are leaks."

Jimmy Lee's face was stern. "Penrose didn't tell me there would be attempts on my life."

Williamson looked around the plane nervously. "Don't talk that way. There was no attempt to rub you out. I told you that. They just wanted to make you sick."

"They succeeded," Jimmy Lee said grimly. "But who were they?"

Williamson drummed his fingers against the seat.

"Because of the sophistication involved, the smooth way they pulled it off, I would say Russian operatives. No local witch doctors gave you the *zets*."

"I take it our people resort to the same tactics?"

Williamson nodded, his face expressionless. "They got stuff that the medical profession cannot even identify. Unknown viruses, they call them, but they're absolutely foolproof and leave no trace at all. If anything, we're way ahead of the other side. Hell, years ago we were using curare, cobra venom, shell-fish poison, botulisms—even anthrax. They were all good, but they showed up in the blood stream."

"What about that strange pistol with the telescopic sight you carry around with you?"

Williamson gaped in surprise. "Where did you see that?"

Jimmy Lee smiled. "I went looking for something at the hotel and it tumbled off a ledge in a closet."

"In Katanga?"

"Yes."

"It's best that you forget about it. I left it behind. It's a highly classified weapon, the answer to the Russian cyanide spray gun. It's called a non-discriminable micro-bionoculator."

"What's that mean?"

"It means it fires poison darts that leave no trace."

Jimmy Lee lapsed into silence. It was time for prayer and meditation. He was deeply enmeshed in mundane activities which, ideally, should be eschewed by a man of the cloth. It was one thing to secretly tape conversations with various foreign leaders. In his view they rarely said anything interesting, although many of the Africans were indiscreet because they assumed he had a direct line

to the White House. Even carrying contraband funds around the world did not offend his concept of right and wrong, but Williamson was very possibly a trained assassin, otherwise why was he armed with a lethal dart gun?

Williamson thumped Jimmy Lee on the knee. "All you got to remember is that no matter what we're involved in, we're a lot more virtuous than our enemies. You're on the side of the angels, so forget it."

Recuperating at home at Mint Hill, Jimmy Lee received a letter marked "personal." He picked up the envelope, slit it open, and a newspaper clipping fell out. The headline read "Lovings Convicted For Black/White Marriage." The story read: "Alexandria, Va.—Mr. & Mrs. Richard Perry Loving were convicted of violating Virginia's two hundred and sixty-five-year-old anti-miscegenation law. He is white and his wife is part Indian and Negro. They were sentenced to one year in jail, but the term was suspended on the condition that the couple leave Virginia and not return for twenty-five years."

Jimmy Lee's hands were shaking as he put down the clipping. Who was it? He snatched up the envelope. It was postmarked New Orleans, but surely Rena wouldn't do that to him after all these years. She bore him no ill will.

It was ominous. Perhaps it was just some crank who was letting him know how he felt about mixed marriages. Jimmy's views on the equality of the races had been met with much criticism in the South. He'd take up the matter immediately with Malcolm. He'd know how to handle it.

A few days later Malcolm phoned him.

"I figure it was the kid. He was in New Orleans at the time."

"Then you think he knows."

"He must. You want me to find out?"

Jimmy Lee hesitated for a moment and then said, "Yes. I guess it's better if you see Rena at this time."

Williamson flew to New Orleans that afternoon. The following morning he was in the executive offices of Daisy-Bloom Enterprises. He spoke briefly with Sol Bloom, executive vice president of the corporation, a genial, balding man of fifty-five or sixty.

"Well, I'm sorry I can't help you. But you can talk to Rena. Here she is now."

Williamson turned to see a svelte, young-looking black woman enter the room. She was stunningly dressed in a white Chanel suit and a small toque hat. "Okay Sol, thanks for entertaining Mr. Williamson. I'll take over now."

Malcolm followed Rena into a large modern office. He sat down in a Mies chair. "It's just as I told you on the phone," Williamson said. "I'm certain your son sent the clipping to Jimmy Lee."

"Well, he hasn't mentioned a thing to me. Hasn't said a word, doesn't even give an indication that he knows anything. He stays away from me except when he needs money."

"You give it to him, don't you?"

"Not enough. He wants it all. Too bad, he isn't a bad kid, but I think Korea ruined him. He doesn't want to work. Somehow he got through college. I guess he's bright, but all he wants is booze, pot, and broads, and not necessarily in that order."

"If you hear anything definite from or about Damon

that indicates that he might plan to do something about Jimmy, you will let us know?"

"Right away."

A few weeks later, while Jimmy Lee was sitting alone in his office in Chicago, the door suddenly swung open, and a strange-looking, light-skinned black walked in. He was wearing a white shirt open at the throat, no neck tie, but was otherwise respectably dressed in a dark suit.

"Surprise," the stranger called out in a loud voice, and broke into hysterical laughter.

Malcolm Williamson swept into the room and closed the door, and then, because of the look of concern on Williamson's face, Jimmy Lee guessed who his caller was.

"Sit down, son," he commanded.

"Why you mother," Damon snarled.

"Don't say it," Malcolm Williamson said, grabbing him, "or I'll break your arm."

Damon Daniels White winced as Malcolm twisted his arm. He moved to a chair under pressure and was released by Williamson.

He looked up at Malcolm. "You my daddy's gorilla?"

Williamson peered into Damon's eyes. "He's on something. Hash, coke, something . . . he's higher than a kite. Let me get him out of here. He won't make any sense out of this."

"No wait," said Jimmy, peering at his son, searching for a family resemblance. He had to admit it was all there. No denying it. The general configuration of the face was that of the Hawkes family, the high-bridged nose particularly. He was obviously half white, and irrefutably a Hawkes in appearance.

"Son," Jimmy Lee said quietly, "I'll try to help you, to

make it up to you. Send you away to a sanitarium. How did you get in this condition?"

There was spittle drooling out of the side of Damon's mouth. "Why," he said with a smile, "my mother runs a whorehouse and my daddy is a minister."

Williamson grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and pulled Damon to his feet. Jimmy rushed to his side, as Damon whipped out a small nickle-plated pistol. The three men wrestled for it, the gun went off once, and Damon fell to the floor—karate-chopped by Malcolm Williamson.

Williamson, breathing heavily, turned to Jimmy. He picked up the pistol. "You all right?"

"I think so," Jimmy Lee said. "Wait a minute. I caught that shot in the foot." He held up his right foot and watched the blood ooze out of a small hole in the wing-tip.

Jimmy Lee had to accept the Brotherhood Award the following evening at a banquet given at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York. There was a lot of kidding about his suffering from the gout, but there was no avoiding it. He wore a slipper on his right foot and walked with a cane, but he took the jokes in good humor.

God, he felt awful. Damon was aware that he was trying to climb out of a black hole, an all-engulfing darkness, but each time he struggled to reach a level of consciousness, he slipped back into the pit. Finally, he broke through, his vision came into focus and, when he realized he was in a strait jacket, he fainted.

When he returned to consciousness they were in the room with him. Without wasted motion they "prepped" him, injecting him with a hypodermic. He was falling again, plummeting through space, and he wanted to

scream but he couldn't, and again, everything was nausea and darkness.

Jimmy Lee was greatly troubled by the episode with his son. His own son, demented with hate and rage, intoxicated on God only knew what drugs, had attempted to kill him. If it had happened the truth would have come out. It was only through the Company's influence that Williamson and Penrose were able to have the attack covered up.

His hands shook as he thought of what would happen to him, but more importantly of what it would mean to Rachel and the girls if Damon's story was ever made public. It would mean complete and total ruin.

He had been waiting nervously for word from Malcolm Williamson on young Damon's condition. Malcolm had gone out to the private sanitarium where the Company had had Damon concealed for the last three days.

When he arrived, Jimmy Lee stood up to greet him, not without some pain. The bullet had broken a small bone in the metatarsals when it had gone through his shoe.

"Sit down, Jimmy, sit down." Malcolm commanded good humoredly. "Sorry I couldn't get back earlier, but I had a lot of consulting to do with the doctors."

"With Penrose too?" Jimmy Lee asked.

Williamson looked glum.

"Well," said Jimmy Lee sitting down, "tell me the worst. What's going to happen?"

Williamson's face broke into his best sincere, but artificial smile. "Now everything's going to be all right," he said in a low, confident voice. "Just you listen. The bad thing is the kid. He's kind of shot physically. Been on everything but heroin, but he's had everything else, and

there may be brain damage. They don't know yet. They'll run more tests and we'll know for sure."

"There's no chance that he'll . . ."

"Die?" Williamson finished Jimmy Lee's question for him. Williamson looked at the floor. "I tell you, when you're dealing with junkies there's always a chance of a fatality. They O.D. all of the time."

"But," protested Jimmy Lee, "he's in the hospital now. How can he get an overdose?"

"Take it easy, now. That's right, he is now, but he won't be forever."

Williamson intuitively recognized that Jimmy Lee had suspected that the Company might deliberately look for an easy way of eliminating Damon. Williamson had told him once that once a man has a record for drug addiction that his death by drugs is regarded as self-inflicted.

"Calm down, now, Jimmy Lee, calm down," Williamson said in a soothing voice. "They'll straighten him out and he'll be out in no time."

There was something in Williamson's manner that made Jimmy Lee not believe him. He was sure that Williamson was in some way or another falsely reassuring him.

"Did they find out why he wanted to shoot me?"

Williamson nodded. "Yes, they've had him on sodium pentothal and he gave us the works. The expected thing—hatred for his father because he was illegitimate. A twisted mind under the influence of drugs."

"What about his political orientation? He was at Berkeley. Remember that report you showed me that time. He's not in any radical movement, is he?"

Williamson was silent. Strange how Jimmy Lee had pressed him on that point. He had been specifically

ordered by Penrose not to reveal Damon's radical connections. Jimmy Lee was not to be told that his son had been informed that he was wired into the CIA. The guilt might be too much for the evangelist, so he was not to be told.

"No," Williamson said. "He knew a lot of those people out there, but he really didn't get involved. He was living the easy life, high on the hog, with checks from his mother."

"I've got to get word to Rena somehow," Jimmy Lee said in a dazed way. "She'll be worried about him. I . . . I am worried about him. I tend to forget that I am his father, God help me." His voice choked in his throat.

Malcolm walked around the desk and threw an arm over Jimmy Lee's shoulder. "Look, old friend. You're paying for a youthful indiscretion. You're only human, after all. You're not superman, you know. You're human."

"Yes, I know," said Jimmy Lee, "but I should stand by the poor kid."

"You will, you will. No fear, only you're not going to be publicly linked with him, that's all. Penrose said that he was to get the best of care. Don't fret over him."

Jimmy Lee allowed himself to be comforted and reassured by Williamson, but he distrusted anything that David Penrose had to do with.

Jimmy Lee knew what he had to do to make things right for himself, to make things right with the Lord. He had to unburden himself to his helpmate. He had to tell Rachel everything. It would be hard to admit that for all of these years he had kept his awful secret from her.

That night Jimmy Lee flew to Savannah and had a late

supper with Rachel. After finishing the meal, which he knew was delicious, but was all too tasteless to him, Jimmy Lee said, "Rachel, darling, let's walk for a bit. I have something to tell you."

They walked in silence enjoying the night sounds, the tell-tale noises that there was life in the fields and the thickets. The grass had just been cut and gave off a clean sweet smell, and, from the barns in the distance, the winds carried the sharp perfume of new-mown hay.

He was going to have to take his own advice, follow his own counsel. "I'm a sinner, Rachel," he said in a voice that was too loud. He lowered his voice and said it again, without breaking stride and looking straight ahead.

Rachel gave his arm a squeeze of understanding and in a soft voice said, "We are all sinners, Jimmy Lee."

Jimmy Lee stopped, turned to his wife and looked her squarely in the eyes. "Darling-girl, I have offended you, I have offended the Lord. I . . . I . . . sired a child, a boy, by Damon's daughter."

Rachel looked up at her husband, her sweet face illuminated by the moonlight. "Husband," she said, "I've been waiting a good long time for you to tell me that."

Jimmy Lee was perplexed. "Wha . . . does that mean that you knew? Why? How?"

She put a hand over Jimmy Lee's mouth. "Shush now, and I'll tell you. I had a hunch almost from the very beginning when I heard about her having the child and her marriage. There was something about the way your mother's old cook acted."

"Mona?" Jimmy Lee said with wonder. "Why, that was years and years ago."

Rachel nodded. "And then I got a strange, almost

demented letter. It was anonymous, but I'm sure Mona wrote it. It said that you were indeed the father of Rena's child. Mona died shortly afterward, so there was nothing to do about it but wait for you to confirm or deny it. Even that day in Chicago, in the elevator of the Drake Hotel, I had a feeling he was your little boy." She sobbed for a brief moment and he opened his arms to her. "No," she said, "I'm all right. It's just that children become such victims."

Jimmy Lee hung his head. "Yes, that is so. Innocent victims."

"Come now, Jimmy Lee," Rachel said firmly. "Let us kneel down right here and say a prayer of thanks for what has just happened. You were and are a good man, I know that, but you have been carrying a terrible burden all these years. It's all over now. Oh, I am so happy. I've been waiting for the day that you would feel that you could tell me."

They walked back to the big house and stayed up for several more hours while Jimmy Lee told Rachel of his involvements with Rena, with Daolah and of his activities with the CIA.

Rachel said, "I know that whatever you do will be the right thing. I know that you want to try to protect your son. I think you should, too. You have got to go to Penrose. Yes, I think that is what you have to do."

Jimmy Lee agreed. He'd call and ask for an appointment with Penrose either in New York or Washington. He wouldn't even bother to tell Williamson about his plans. He dropped off to sleep as soon as his head touched the pillow.

The next morning Jimmy Lee had no trouble reaching

Penrose's private secretary. He arranged a meeting three days later in New York. "Will Mr. Williamson be coming to New York with you?" the secretary asked.

"I think not," said Jimmy Lee, aware that he was breaking an established procedure.

Jimmy Lee was admitted to Penrose's suite in the Hotel Pierre and led through the foyer to a splendidly furnished sitting room that overlooked Central Park. Penrose was standing at one of the windows, and without turning he motioned Jimmy Lee to join him at the window.

Jimmy Lee looked down at the park twenty-six stories below, stretching from Fifty-Ninth Street to the south to One Hundred Tenth Street in the north. From their position it appeared like a vast, tailored English garden with its winding roads, transverses, vast greenswards and beautiful trees.

Penrose shot Jimmy Lee an icy smile. "I'm sure you came here about your . . . about young Damon. Am I right?"

Jimmy Lee flushed slightly and said, "Yes, I have come about my son."

"We figured as much when you failed to make your appointment through Malcolm Williamson. Why did you break established procedure?"

Jimmy Lee jutted out his jaw and said, "I felt the urgency of the matter justified trying to reach you directly."

Penrose nodded. "Just so. Well, what can I do for you?"

Jimmy Lee cleared his throat. "I want to know what is going to be done about Damon. I want to help him if I can."

Penrose pursed his lips, groped around in one of his jacket pockets and brought out a meerschaum pipe. From his other pocket he fetched out a leather pouch of tobacco. He proceeded to fill his pipe and then said in a low voice, "Without meaning to sound sarcastic, Jimmy, your interest seems belated."

Jimmy Lee blushed crimson and said nothing. There was nothing for him to say. Penrose was absolutely right.

Penrose's manner was reassuring, his voice low and confidential. "We know you want the best for your boy. We're going to do our best for him because of you. Malcolm knew how you'd feel."

"In real life what does that mean? I don't want him prosecuted . . . punished."

Replying with some brusqueness Penrose said, "Surely you don't want us to just turn him loose? So he can take another pot-shot at you next week."

"Why, ah, no, of course not."

"Good. That's the way we see it. He's going to require extensive therapy. The doctors are going to break his amphetamine addiction, make him healthy in body and mind, and then we'll see about him getting out."

Penrose sucked on his pipe stem, abruptly indicating that the interview was over. "It's just best for everyone this way, that's all. Malcolm will be on top of things for you. He'll be talking with the doctors, making visits. You can have complete faith in Malcolm."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Jimmy Lee, walking to the foyer. Stopping and turning to Penrose he said, "I wonder if you'd mind if I sort of started to phase myself out of Company activities now. I . . ."

Penrose pulled the pipe out of his mouth in an angry motion. "Whaaaat? That doesn't seem to be the proper

attitude for you to take at all, Reverend. After all, you're alive because one of our men grabbed a gun away from a crazed assassin. Your name has been protected. No scandal, from the distant, or recent, past has touched you. We need you. We like the arrangement and," he paused and spoke with finality, "the arrangement will continue."

Jimmy Lee realized immediately that he was being set straight. He would withdraw from Company activities only when the Company wanted it. "Otherwise?" Jimmy Lee said softly.

"Otherwise, you can take the consequences. But," added Penrose in a hearty voice, "let's not think of that unpleasant possibility." He clapped Jimmy Lee on the back, shook his hand vigorously and said, "See you soon." He opened the door and Jimmy Lee was alone in the hallway.

In the next six months Jimmy Lee made two trips abroad, accompanied by Malcolm Williamson, for brief appearances in foreign countries. In each case he was "wired-up" and taped his conversations with high-ranking foreign officials. To him the conversations seemed innocuous, but Malcolm assured him that they were extremely valuable to the Company. Malcolm also reminded him that it was an ideal system to transfer certain emoluments to friends of the Company.

Malcolm Williamson had also visited Damon Daniels White on at least four occasions in the same half year. His reports to Jimmy Lee were that Damon continued to have emotional problems, but that physically he had responded to treatment. "He's coming along fine," Malcolm said. "I think he'll be able to get out in another

few months."

At Rachel's urging Jimmy Lee had asked Malcolm to keep Rena informed of her son's condition and treatment. Rena had known of Damon's experiments with amphetamines and was, therefore, resigned to his continued treatment at a Nevada sanitarium. She was unhappy about not being allowed to visit her son but accepted Williamson's assurances that he was responding to therapy.

One morning three months later Malcolm strode into Jimmy Lee's office and announced, "Damon is in New Orleans living with his mother."

Jimmy Lee grasped Malcolm's hand. "How is the boy? Is he fully recovered? What's the prognosis?"

Malcolm laughed and edged himself into a chair. "Wait a minute, Jimmy. One question at a time. He's in pretty good shape. I saw him myself yesterday. He's a changed man. I think you'd expect that. He's kind of quiet and introspective, but he's obviously more stable. The doctors are pleased. They think he's going to make it."

"What about Rena? How does she feel about it?"

Malcolm was quiet for a moment. "Well, she isn't too happy about the kid. Says he's too quiet."

"Oh?"

"Listen, Jimmy," Malcolm said confidentially. "I've got some big things to talk over with you. I want you to have dinner tonight with me at my hotel. Can you make it?"

"Where and when?"

"The Ambassador East. Seven o'clock. I'll have dinner served in the room so we can talk."

After Mal left Jimmy Lee bowed his head and said a

prayer of thanks to the Lord for having spared his son. He had been terrified that Damon would never be released from the sanitarium.

Looking back on his troubled past, Jimmy Lee had a lot to be thankful for. Damon was alive and from all reports was reacting well to his therapy. According to what Rena had told Malcolm, the boy knew that he could have been put in prison for a long time for attempted homicide. Rena, too, was outwardly reformed. She was no longer running the New Orleans brothel and the infamous Wanda's was now the sole property of Clara Moo.

As the future shaped up in his eyes, Jimmy Lee envisioned only self-sacrifice, hard work, and absolutely no temptation for the next few years. Somehow, the knowledge that the cold blue eyes of David Penrose might be reading a report on him gave added strength to this resolve.

A quarter of an hour before his dinner appointment with Malcolm Williamson, Jimmy Lee closed his office and took a taxi to the Ambassador East. Precisely at seven o'clock he entered Malcolm's suite.

Malcolm poured out two generous glasses of wine and the two men sat down.

After dinner Malcolm lit up a cigar and said, "Jimmy Lee, I'm leaving the Company. I wanted you to be one of the first to know, because I won't be working with you anymore."

The news came as a shock to Jimmy Lee. "I'm sorry to hear that Malcolm. I . . . I have come to lean on you, depend on you, perhaps too much."

"I know."

"What will you do?"

"I've got the whole thing set up. I'm joining a public relations firm that specializes in Middle Eastern clients; American and British oil companies, a couple of airlines and some very rich oil potentates."

"Sounds awfully good."

"It is. In some cases the potentates are in power because the Company rigged the elections for them. They know that we have a direct line to Washington because they know we work for Washington. The other guys, the ones who run the oil companies and the airlines, they work for the Company, or used to."

Malcolm emptied his wine glass in one gulp, wiped his mouth with the back of his other hand and said, "Why'd you try to ease yourself out of the Company less than a year ago?"

"Oh, you knew that. I might have known that you would."

"Sure, I knew. Well, why'd you want out?"

"I am a minister, a man of the cloth. It's a little bit different for me."

"That's not what you've been saying to me."

Jimmy Lee was annoyed with Malcolm for pressing him, for making him face up to his compromises. "Oh, come on now, Malcolm," he said, "you've had too much to drink."

Malcolm's face fell. He turned away from Jimmy Lee and walked to the sideboard. There he filled his wine glass again. "Perhaps, perhaps," he said dully and he walked over to a chair and sat down. "Guess I needed a few drinks to tell you this."

"I can't understand why you're leaving now," Jimmy Lee said, shaking his head. "You've given over twenty years to the cause."

"Jimmy Lee, your son is a vegetable. A nice quiet vegetable."

"What . . . what are you saying?"

Malcolm nodded. "They have permanently tranquilized him."

A wave of fear and uncertainty passed over Jimmy Lee. "What does that mean? Tell me, tell me for God's sake."

Malcolm wrinkled up his face as if he were in pain. "You can't do anything about it. It's too late and you're not supposed to know. They programmed him, used a lot of electric shock treatments, hypnosis, biochemical therapy. He's a nice quiet zombie. Rena noticed it right away. He'll never be an addict again, but he's subhuman."

"Wasn't there any other way?"

Sadly, Malcolm shook his head. "He was determined to name you as his father, to accuse you of working with the Company. He had fallen in with some tough people."

Jimmy Lee stood up and walked to the door.

Malcolm walked toward him. "Jimmy Lee, wait, where are you going?"

"I'm going home to pray."

"Good," said Malcolm, bitterly. "You do that."

Some time later Jimmy Lee ran into Malcolm Williamson at a Washington party. They exchanged warm greetings, but spent no time together. Both men agreed to call one another soon. For a moment Jimmy Lee was alone standing with a glass of orange juice in his hand. He heard someone call him.

"Reverend Hawkes."

He turned to see the bulldog features of the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Ah, good evening, Mr. Hoover. How are you?"

"Couldn't be better. Say, what do you think of what's going on down there in Birmingham?"

Jimmy Lee was at a loss. "In Birmingham. You know with this young fellow, Martin Luther King," the Director said.

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy Lee. "Well, I haven't been following his activities very closely but I think he is a fine man. I mean, he is a man who genuinely speaks for peace, who opposes violence."

"Yeah," said the Director, "I know all that, but I can't stand a hypocrite."

"What's that, sir?"

"Well, he's a preacher, a minister, man of the cloth and all that and he just can't stay out of bed with white women." He fixed a hard eye, an unflinching eye on Jimmy Lee. "Know what I mean? I can't stand a hypocrite."

"Y . . . yes," was all Jimmy Lee could say.

The Director walked away slowly.

The End